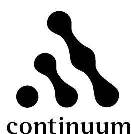
IDENTITY AS REASONED CHOICE

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A SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE REACH AND RESOURCES OF PUBLIC AND PRACTICAL REASON IN SHAPING INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES

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Preface

It is a fact made evident by the increasingly multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-racial nature of modern societies that each of us has access to multiple sources of identity, and it follows that you can no longer think of your identity as something merely given by birth but must see it rather as something you actively and deliberatively choose. What resources are available to an individual making this sort of choice? My book is an analysis of that question. The argument of the book is that one's identity – by which I mean the aspects of oneself (individual, moral, political, intellectual, aesthetic or religious; one's class, gender or vocation; one's interests, family or ethnicity; and much else besides) that one values and endorses valuing – is a work of reason. Using theory retrieved from India, my claim will be that identities are fashioned from exercises of reason as derivation from exemplary and paradigmatic cases, that it is procedures of adaptation and substitution from what I will call 'local norms' which is distinctive of the rational formation of an identity.

I have therefore divided the book into five sections. In the first section, I examine the concept of public reason, that is, the modalities of reasoning in multi-participant environments where the aim is to reach a consensus. I stress that the emergence of consensus does not require that all the participants share common background values, but only that the background resources of each participant supply them with the necessary tools to engage in public deliberation. In the second section, I look at a distinctive model of reasoning, one I find to be widespread in much Indian rational discourse. This is an adaptive model according to which exemplary cases provide local standards of evaluation, which then spread and generalise their normative potential. In the third part, I stress the importance of dissent within a model of deliberative reasoning, and the problem I try to address is to locate those features of the models of public and practical reasoning, as sketched in the first two sections, which make

dissent possible within Indian traditions of discussion. In the fourth section I look at some ways in which the bearing of reason on identity has been conceived in Indian intellectual history, focusing on conceptions of the self and its moral identity, and I argue that these historical conceptions supply further resources, to be used creatively and adaptively in the fashioning of modern identities. In the fifth section I consider more generally how a modern intellectual should make use of past cultures of reasoning and identity-formation.

My research methodology has been to draw on classical Indian philosophical theory, but not in the way that it is studied by philologists or historians of Indian philosophy. Rather, I study in detail the precise nature of the resources presented to an individual by India's cultures of reasoning and public debate. It is my belief that the question posed in this book is one which is internal to the Indian theory itself, and governs the nature of its development. My firm conviction is that contemporary debates about global governance and cosmopolitan identities can benefit from resources drawn from Indian discussion of public and practical reason, resources that have been developed in circumstances of intercultural pluralism and with an emphasis on consensual resolution of conflict. One of my broader aims is to demonstrate that parties with conceptions of the good defined by religious affiliation can nevertheless enter into an overlapping consensus; that is, that a diversity of religious affiliation need not be an obstacle to participation in democratic secular governance. Here my examination of the resources made available by India's intellectual past is to be seen as a case study of a general phenomenon, and similar case studies of other intellectual cultures in both Asia and the West, with due attention to *their* specificities and nuances, can and should be undertaken.

Insofar as my claim is that your identity is grounded in what you choose rationally to endorse, my investigations here pertain to the question 'What makes some value, attitude or preference *your own*?'; that is, to the question of the ownership of mental states. I argue in *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness and the First-Person Stance* that an answer to this question is constitutive of a conception of self, and the present work can therefore be seen as drawing out some of the practical consequences of the more abstract and theoretical discussion there.[1] In another book, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700 CE*, I demonstrate

[1] Jonardon Ganeri, *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness and the First-Person Stance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

how the philosophers of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century India creatively re-appropriate the ancient tradition, and in doing so fashion a radically new philosophy and a new conception of self, one suited to the unusual times in which they lived.[2] One might see in that work a case study of many of the ideas I will be presenting here, especially about the right way for modern individuals to retrieve India's past and adapt it in shaping contemporary identities.

Earlier versions of some of the material have appeared in print elsewhere, and I am grateful for relevant permissions to reproduce this material here: 'Ancient Indian Logic as a Theory of Case-based Reasoning', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 31 (2003), pp. 33–45; 'Argumentation, Dialogue and the *Kathāvatthu*', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29.4 (2001), pp. 485–93; 'Hinduism', in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Paul Draper (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010); 'The Ritual Roots of Moral Reason', in *Thinking Through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 207–33; 'Can You Seek the Answer to This Question', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88 (2010), pp. 571–94, co-authored with A. D. Carpenter; 'A Return to the Self: Life as Art and Philosophical Therapy', in *Philosophy as Therapeia*, ed. Jonardon Ganeri and Clare Carlisle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010), pp. 119–35; 'Morality and Self: Some Indian Perspectives on Sorabji,' *Antiqua Philosophia* 2 (2008), pp. 25–34; '"What You Are You Do Not See, What You See Is Your Shadow": The Philosophical Double in Mauni's Fiction', in Andrew Hock Soon Ng (ed.), *The Poetics of Shadows: The Double in Literature and Philosophy* (Hanover: Ibidem-Verlag, March 2008), pp. 109–22; 'The Study of the Self', in *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. David Cheetham and Rolfe King (London: Continuum, 2008); 'Interpreting Indian Rational Traditions', *Journal of Hindu Studies* (2010), pp. 1–10; 'Intellectual India: Reason, Identity, Dissent', *New Literary History* 40.2 (2009), pp. 248–63.

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[2] Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); see especially pp. 49, 247.

Introduction: The Reach and Resources of Reason

India has a long and multi-faceted culture of argumentation and public reasoning.[1] In recent work, Amartya Sen has sought to provide the history of this culture with a global context.[2] Public reasoning is fundamental to both democratic politics and secular constitutional arrangements, and it is, he argues, no accident that India, with its extensive traditions of tolerance and the admission of dissenting voices in public discourse, should have deep democratic and secular instincts. This is something, Sen suggests, which more narrowly sectarian understandings of India have lost sight of, and he recommends that we keep in mind figures such as the Indian emperors Aśoka and Akbar, both of whom strongly encouraged public debate and respect for the heterodox, and also internal voices of dissent like the Hindu atheist Jāvāli, so vividly depicted in the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*. Sen insists that such individuals are as much the precursors of a modern Indian identity as any other figure drawn from Indian history. It is therefore a mistake to think of democracy and secularism as Western values which India has latterly embraced, for 'public reasoning is central to democracy, [and] part of the global roots of democracy can indeed be traced to the tradition of public discussion that received much encouragement in both India and China from the dialogic commitment of Buddhist organisation'.[3] The demonstrably global origin of cultures of

[1] See Esther A. Solomon, *Indian Dialectics,* 2 vols (Ahmedabad: B. J. Institute of Learning and Research, 1978); Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Character of Logic in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Jonardon Ganeri, *Indian Logic: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[2] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* (London: Allen Lane, 2005; London: Penguin, 2006).

[3] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian,* p. 182. On Buddhist theory, see Chapter 3 below.

public reasoning not only undermines any thought that the West has a distinctive claim upon liberal values, but also, as importantly, it undercuts arguments that there are things called 'Asian values' which are antithetical to ideas of democracy, secularism, and human rights.[4] There are no 'cultural boundaries' in the reach of reasons or in the availability of values like tolerance and liberty.[5]

Another central idea in Sen's work has been that reason is *before* identity, meaning that each of us is free to reason about what is of value and significance to us in whatever situations we find ourselves; that neither religion nor community nor tradition imposes upon us an identity fixed in advance.[6] There is a relationship between identity and freedom, because a full sense of agency involves not only 'control over decisions' but also 'the freedom to question established values and traditional priorities',[7] including the freedom to decide, if one chooses, that religious or communitarian affiliations are of less significance to one than one's literary, political, or intellectual commitments:

> We have choice over what significance to attach to our different identities. There is no escape from reasoning just because the notion of identity has been involved.[8]

A very astute analysis of the concept of identity in play is supplied by Akeel Bilgrami. He distinguishes between subjective and objective aspects of identity, where one's subjective identity consists in those among one's characteristics which one values and endorses valuing in a relatively non-revisable manner, while the objective aspects of one's identity are such as those deriving from one's biological inheritance.[9] The 'objective' aspects will be less important to my discussion than those for which a notion of rational endorsement is constitutive; I am interested here in the processes

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[4] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, pp. 134–7. See also Chapters 15 and 16 below.

[5] Ibid., p. 280.

[6] Amartya Sen, *Reason Before Identity: The Romanes Lecture of 1998* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[7] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 240.

[8] Ibid., p. 352.

[9] Akeel Bilgrami, 'Note Towards the Definition of "Identity"', in Jyotirmaya Sharma and A. Raghuramajaru (eds), *Grounding Morality: Freedom, Knowledge and the Plurality of Cultures* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), pp. 43–59.

through which one fashions a sense of self through the ways one reasons about which values to endorse.

Reasoning has centre stage both in shaping individual identities and in deliberating about public good, and in seeking to give structure and substance to those deliberations the whole of India's intellectual past is available, a past that has been deeply international and profoundly inter-religious. Sen finds in Rabindranath Tagore's assertion that 'the idea of India militates itself against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others' two thoughts in tandem: one that opposes the idea of India as a mere federation of separate and alienated religious communities; the other opposing an isolationist conception of India in the world.[10] In the global circulation of ideas, India has always been a major player, and the combination of 'internal pluralism' and 'external receptivity' has fashioned for India a 'spacious and assimilative Indian identity'.[11]

I admire much in Sen's argument, and what I will say will for the most part agree with and develop the important considerations he has brought out. While rightly emphasising India's argumentative cultures and historical accommodation of dissenting voices, however, the lack of detail in his description of those traditions is striking. Despite its title, there is in *The Argumentative Indian* little mention of any actual analyses of public reasoning in India; no reference, for example, to seminal works on dialectic and argumentation such as the Buddhist *Elements of Dialogue* (*Kathāvatthu*), the *Nyāya-sūtra* of Gautama, or Śrīharṣa's radical critique in his *Amassed Morsels of Refutation* (*Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khādya*). Still less is there any significant description of the resources of practical reason in India's intellectual past, or of the ways identities are understood as fashioned and not found. Sen's understanding of the 'reach' of reason, of the utility of critical public discussion, and of rationality in human psychology hardly makes reference to India's long tradition of thought about these topics. This is puzzling. It is as if the mere fact of this culture of argumentation is sufficient for Sen, that the substance of that culture is irrelevant. Or else it is as if Sen presumes *a priori* that the substance must coincide in all important respects with the substance as it features in contemporary work on political and social theory. In short, while Sen speaks freely about exemplary *political* figures like Aśoka and Akbar, he is largely silent about the intellectual figures who have provided India with its theoretical resources and self-understandings. Sen observes with decisive clarity how

[10] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 349.

[11] Ibid., p. 346.

a false contrast between the intellectual traditions of India and the West is brought about by the biases in the respective histories that are told, that:

> In comparing Western thoughts and creations with those in India, the appropriate counterpoints of Aristotelian or Stoic or Euclidean analyses are not the traditional beliefs of the Indian rural masses or of the local wise men but the comparably analytical writings of, say, Kauṭilya or Nāgārjuna or Āryabhaṭa. 'Socrates meets the Indian peasant' is not a good way to contrast the respective intellectual traditions.[12]

What I find astonishing, though, is that this is the only time Sen mentions Nāgārjuna in the whole book, and of the many great Indian intellectuals who have thought so long and so hard about reason – theoretical, practical and public – Nāgārjuna is lucky in getting a mention at all; no Nyāya philosopher is mentioned, for example, and the word 'nyāya' is not even in the index.[13] Profoundly aware of the pitfalls, Sen seems nevertheless to fall into them.

Misleading impressions aside, the significant danger here is that a liberal secularism is made to win too easily. The mere suggestion that one should reason more and better might seem to fail to engage at anything other than an abstract admonitory level; it might sound more like enthusiasm than practical advice. This is the deeper worry that motivates attacks on the Enlightenment's appeal to reason, an anxiety more serious simply than that 'reason' has so often been abused for totalitarian ends. What a proper response to that worry requires is a detailed engagement with the resources of reason in India as they are actually in play or can be brought

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[12] Ibid., p. 158.

[13] The term 'nyāya' has three distinct meanings. It denotes a school of philosophy committed to the use of evidence-based methods of inquiry, including observation, inference, and also testimony insofar as it is grounded in verifiable trustworthiness. The term also signifies a particular five-step pattern of demonstrative reasoning, which I will describe in Chapter 1. In a rather different sense, 'nyāya' refers to a set of heuristic principles to guide practical reason. In his recent study, *The Idea of Justice* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), Sen does mention 'nyāya', but has in mind only this third sense. The heuristic principles are collected by G. A. Jacob in *A Handful of Popular Maxims Current in Sanskrit Literature (Laukika-nyāyāñjali)* (Bombay: Tukaram Javaji, 1900–1904), and by V. S. Apte in 'A Collection of Popular Sanskrit Maxims', in his *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Revised and Enlarged,* Appendix E (Kyoto: Rinsen Publishers, 1957).

into play. My proposal, in other words, is that the focus needs to shift from the idea of *reach* to the idea of *resources*, in thinking about the place of reason in the fashioning of identities.

The cause of Sen's silence is, I think, that his primary interest is in provisions of the secular state as such, and not in what it is to be a participant within it. A secular state tries to work out how to structure its policies and institutions in such a way that there is *symmetry* in the state's dealings with any particular group, religion, class, or individual. The appropriate model of reason here is the one which John Rawls seeks to capture with his use of the term 'public reason'.[14] Public reason is the mode of deliberation that brings people of diverse philosophical, religious, and moral conviction into a state of rational accord with respect to a matter of mutual concern and common interest. In a pluralistic community tolerant of difference, it is essential that the resources, reach, and requirements of public reason be properly understood, and no such understanding is acceptable that gives discriminate advantage to the particular view of any one of the parties in the deliberation. For a straightforward if overly simple example of the workings of public reason, consider the following account of the process leading to the preparation of a common communique at a recent meeting of the G8 industrialised countries: 'Acting under the policy parameters set by their political masters . . . the job (of the negotiating officials or "sherpas") is to move words and phrases in and out of square brackets. If a phrase stays in square brackets, it is not agreed. If it comes out of brackets, consensus is reached.'[15]

But the view from the side of the institutions and the state is blind to the question that is most pressing for the participants themselves. That is the question of how a specific individual, whose access to resources of reason has a particular shape and character, finds *within* those resources the materials to engage in acts of public and practical reason. How, for example, does such an individual find his or her way to a conception of deliberative thinking about the public good? How do they form a conception of the rationality and entitlements of other participants in the public space, for whom the resources of reason are different?[16]

[14] See, for example, John Rawls, Lecture VI in *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[15] 'Sherpas call tune for political masters', *The Guardian*, 30 June 2005, p. 4.

[16] See, in particular, Chapters 3 and 6 below for examples from within Indian religions of the ways this challenge can be met.

It is important, certainly, to point out, as Sen does, that Hinduism contains within itself many dissenting voices and heterodox opinions; but the difficult question is to understand how those dissenters, no less than the mainstream, made sense of their dissent. One needs to show how Hinduism, for example, has within itself models of rational deliberation that make possible the dissenting voices and internal critiques, and how those models also make available to Hindus a conception of what it is to reason about the public good, a space encompassing non-Hindus as well as Hindus of every stripe and persuasion. I will argue that such resources are indeed available, not only in the idea of dialectic or vāda (Chapter 1), but also in mainstream Hindu discussions of the processes and concepts of rationality: *tarka*, *nyāya*, *yukti* and *ūha* (Chapters 2, 4 and 6). An analogous exercise needs to be repeated for each of the participants in a secular state; only in this way can each reach an understanding of what Rawls has appropriately described as the 'overlapping consensus' in which each group, *for its own reasons and on the basis of its own resources of reason*, makes sense of and agrees to a common position or policy.[17] The exercise can already be seen happening within Islam, through a contemporary revival of the practice of *ijtihad* ('intellectual struggling').[18] It can be seen too in contemporary Buddhist discourses on topics such as human rights, abortion and euthanasia.[19]

Space for such an approach depends in part on the identification of a *neutral secularism*, that is, a secularism which demands that politics and affairs of state are unbiased and symmetric in respect of different religions or other modalities of affiliation, in contrast with an understanding of secularism that sees it as requiring the prohibition of any religious association in public or state activities.[20] *Prohibitory secularism*, as we might call it, requires the resources of reason to be wholly disenchanted in public, even those upon which individuals draw. Neutral secularism imposes this requirement only on state invocations of public reason; its requirement on individuals is that their appeal to private resources or reason does not bias them or lead to an asymmetry in their reasoned dealings with others. As I

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[17] Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* Lecture IX.

[18] 'Ijtihad: Reinterpreting Islamic principles for the Twenty-first Century', *USIP Special Report* 125 (2004), pp. 1–8; Muqtedar Khan, 'Two Theories of Ijtihad', http://www.ijtihad.org/ijtihad.htm.

[19] See many of the contributions in the journals *Contemporary Buddhism* and the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*.

[20] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 19; cf. p. 313.

will show in Chapter 3, a Buddhist analysis of reasonable discussion from the time of Aśoka, *the Elements of Dialogue*, provides an astonishingly subtle theorisation of this idea of freedom-from-bias in public reasoning. The background worry, of course, is that in developing the resources of reason *within* Hinduism, *within* Islam, *within* Christianity or *within* Buddhism, we are in some way making reason subordinate to tradition and religious command. Sen reads Akbar as resisting that threat with a strong insistence on the autonomy of reason.[21] My argument is that we can respect the need for autonomy without restricting reason's resources to those merely of allegedly value-free disciplines such as social choice theory. If that is right, then it is a mistake to speak of a conflict between 'secular values' and 'faith values', as if a choice has to be made between the two, for the point is to see how any faith can sustain secular principles in activities of public reasoning, equipping its adherents with the resources needed to participate in deliberative democratic procedures.[22]

I am saying that the appeal to India's cultures of argumentation and public reasoning is hollow if it does not engage with the detail of those cultures. For only in this way does the full panoply that a well-informed 'argumentative Indian' has available to himself or herself come to the fore, in contrast with the restricted vision of a sectarian approach. Likewise, in speaking of the resources for fashioning Indian identities, the wealth of material about self, agency, and identity, whether faith-based or faith-free, needs to be weighed and thought through (see the chapters in Part IV). My point is that these are the intellectual resources that anyone entering a negotiation in public space can and should bring to the table. In the case of figures such as Tagore and Gandhi, this clearly is exactly what happened, Gandhi's re-introduction of the idea of *ahiṃsā* as a defence against inhumanity and injustice being a good case in point. Only in this way can the claims of more sectarian thinkers, that theirs is the sole true inheritance of India, effectively be silenced.

Let me give an example. There is in the *Nyāya-sūtra* an elegant discussion of the various ways in which an opinion or principle might count

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[21] Ibid., p. 274.

[22] I therefore disagree with Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), who sees in what he calls 'secularisation' a distinctive movement within the emergence of European modernity. See further Chapter 5 below.

as 'settled' (*siddhānta*).[23] An opinion might be 'settled' because there is a general consensus, which is further analysed as a situation in which the opinion is accepted by some parties, including one's own, and outright rejected by none (*Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.28). Alternatively, an opinion might be 'settled' in the sense of being accepted by some parties, including one's own, even though it is rejected by others (1.1.29). An opinion is considered 'settled' in a third sense if it used as a premise in further derivations (1.1.30), and in a fourth if it is entertained provisionally for the purpose of considering its merits (1.1.31). The idea of consensus implicit in the first conception of a settled opinion is a valuable and useful one, for it reveals a way to see how achieving consensus might require something weaker than universal endorsement by all parties. Indeed, if the officials at the G8 meeting had been cognisant of this theory, they might have wanted to refine their bracketing method, so as to distinguish between the case where a phrase is accepted by some but rejected by others and the case where it is accepted by some and rejected by none. Insofar as it allows for progress towards a consensus that might not have otherwise been achievable, this would represent a substantive contribution to the actual machinery of public reason. My point is that this analysis of settled opinion is a resource of reason that a well-informed 'argumentative Indian' has at his or her disposal, something that can shape the nature of participation in public debate. It is by acquainting ourselves with such detail that we get a true sense of the 'India large' about which Tagore and Sen speak. And Sen is surely right in his diagnosis of the cause of what he calls the 'extraordinary neglect of Indian works on reasoning, science, mathematics and other so-called "Western spheres of success"',[24] in the 'comprehensive denial of Indian intellectual originality' that one sees in the appalling colonial writings of James Mill and others (more precisely, in the pincer effects of the 'magisterial' and the 'exoticist' approaches to India).[25] The influence of this systematic deprecation is still to be seen in the reluctance of many scholars even today to take seriously the *intellectual substance* of the Indian texts. Sen is right too when he speaks of the need for a 'corrective regarding

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[23] *Gautamīyanyāyadarśana with Bhāṣya of Vātsyāyana*, ed. Anantalal Thakur (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1997). Trans. M. Gangopadhyaya (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present, 1982). Henceforth 'NS'.

[24] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 80. For further discussion of this phenomenon, see Chapter 16 below.

[25] Ibid., pp. 154–5, 160.

Indian traditions in public reasoning and tolerant communication, and more generally what can be called the precursors of democratic practice'.[26] The recovery of theory, such as the example I briefly sketched (and it was, of course, developed to a much greater deal of sophistication than I have revealed), is the way to make good that necessity. Fragments of theory like this one, though presented in the texts as abstracted from any concrete context, were most certainly the product of engagement with the day-to-day business of reasoning publicly about matters of common interest with others who did not share one's views. We should not forget that context even if we cannot always reconstruct it.

I have said that intellectuals like Gandhi and Tagore were most certainly aware of the 'India large', full of resources for reason. For example, Sen observes how Tagore was resistant to anything that seemed to smack of the application of mechanical formulae, that 'the question he persistently asks is whether we have reason enough to want what is being proposed, taking everything into account'.[27] At least two resources from India's intellectual past are available to support such a question. One is the prolonged debate in the *Mahābhārata* over the rights and wrongs of a lie, uttered by Yudhiṣṭhira in a moment of crisis.[28] There are anticipations too of a discussion of the problem that was to challenge Kant and his conception of universal moral law: whether it is right to lie to the malicious pursuers of an innocent person.[29] A careful examination of the Indian handling of this case reveals a decidedly un-Kantian conception of moral reason at work. Another example, perhaps even more interesting, is the strong vein of particularist moral reasoning found in the highly intellectual Mīmāṃsā (see the chapters in Part II). The Mīmāṃsā theoreticians develop an account of practical reasoning that is situational and adaptive, driven by particular cases, and extremely versatile. This again is a resource of great value for any 'argumentative Indian'. Indeed, it is through the imaginative exploitation of such models that dissenters and sceptics find the resources of reason with which to develop their critique.

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[26] Ibid., p. 80.

[27] Ibid., p. 119.

[28] *Mahābhārata* (MBh.) 7.164.67–106; for critical discussion see my *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), Chapter 3.

[29] MBh. 8.69.40–46; see also Chapter 16 below.

Pointing to the brute existence of sceptical voices like that of Jāvāli is only the beginning of the story. What we really need to know is how a sceptic like Jāvāli adapted and manipulated the tools of justification and argument at his disposal so as to make possible (and intelligible) his dissent. If nothing else, that would be a step towards understanding how heterodox voices might similarly empower themselves in global public discourse today. In Sen's observation of the way one sees 'the colonial metropolis supplying ideas and ammunition to post-colonial intellectuals to attack the influence of the colonial metropolis',[30] we see an expression of the typical sceptic manoeuvre. Again, the general pattern of such a move would be familiar to an Indian intellectual with access the materials for reasoned thought that an expansive conception of India makes available. For precisely such strategies have been put into practice by dissident critics of mainstream culture, voices that include the radical Buddhist Nāgārjuna,[31] the free-thinking Jayarāśi,[32] and the brilliant critic Śrīharṣa,[33] all of whom, it must be said, achieve a far greater degree of sophistication and methodological self-awareness than does Jāvāli (I discuss Śrīharṣa in detail in Chapter 9). The strength of their criticism derives precisely from its using the very same resources of reason as its target. For while 'reasoned humanity' should certainly be open to sound criticism from any quarter, it is a fact of human nature that it is much harder to be receptive to criticism formulated by outsiders in outside terms than to criticism made from within in one's own terms. The reason for this is that rational criticism is effective and not merely enthusiastic when it has the potential to become *self-criticism*. This is what avoids what would otherwise be felt as a distant call upon the 'sovereignty of reason'. I have been able to retrieve several new voices of dissent from within the Hindu corpus, all of them embedded, anonymous, and somewhat hidden (Chapters 5 and 8).

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[30] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 133.

[31] Nāgārjuna, *Vigraha-vyāvartanī [Dispeller of Disputes]*, ed. E. H. Johnston and A. Kunst, in *The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna: Vigrahavyāvartanī*, with a translation by Kamaleswar Bhattacharya (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

[32] Jayarāśi, *Tattvopaplava-siṃha [Lion who Upsets Truths]*, ed. Shuchita Mehta, with translation by Esther Solomon (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2010).

[33] Śrīharṣa, *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khādya [Amassed Morsels of Refutation]*, ed. N. Jha, Kashi Sanskrit Series 197 (Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1970); trans. G. Jha, *The Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya of Śrīharṣa* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2nd edn, 1986).

I will argue that a contemporary identity should avail itself in a substantive way of resources of reason from the *whole* of the past. In what follows I will demonstrate the vitality, breadth, and relevance of India's intellectual past in this process. I discuss examples across the spectrum: from the work of Buddhist intellectuals at the time of Aśoka to post-Independence writers of fiction; from ancient Vedic ritual theory to classical epistemology. Reasoning is implicated in the choice over what significance to attach to the diverse strands that make up our identities. According to the useful analysis of the Roman Stoics, individuals have four distinguishable 'personae', each of which has its role in practical decision-making. Their personae are: one's rational being; the position one is born into; the choices one makes; and what fortune deals. The first of these personae is a part of our common humanity, something we all share; the other three are individual. Insofar as it is possible to deliberate about one's identity, therefore, the important point is that two forces will always be at work: one which takes our common humanity as its starting point; the other making choices based on our individual needs, natures, inheritances, and situations. The dialectical interplay between these two forces is a running theme in Indian discussions of selfhood, the quest for a universal self having been put firmly on the intellectual map by the Upaniṣads two millennia or more ago, and again, in a different way, by the Buddha (Chapters 10, 11, 12). It is not easy to decide what to do, in a Kantian fashion, on the basis of the principles of pure reason, and yet no easier to exercise real choice in matters that shape the sort person one is to be. So individuals tend to move back and forth between the two, in sort of a perpetual oscillation. Something of this is caught brilliantly by a Tamil short story writer of post-Independence India, whose pen name was 'Mauni', the silent one. He uses the narrative device of the double to investigate the to-and-fro between our cosmopolitan and our individual selves (Chapter 13). I have included a study of a piece of modern fiction in order to emphasise that the mechanisms involved in the rational formation of individuals are ones for which a sensitivity to the literary dimensions of a text are important, and also because it presents a good example of the way ideas from India's past permit creative appropriation in the present.

One response to that oscillation is to attempt to cultivate a more fixed relationship with our rational being, our cosmopolitan self. We might think of this as involving something like a 'return' to a natural state of being, an idea expressed by the Sanskrit term *svāsthya*, 'coinciding with oneself', and we might think of the relevant way to cultivate such a return as involving a reining in of individual emotional attachments (which texts

like the *Mahābhārata* describe as a 'taming' of the self; see Chapter 10). To put that thought another way, what one does is to cultivate the ability to choose not to attach value or significance on the basis of merely private passions. My point is not that the problems of the ancients are also our problems, but rather that in the formation of modern identities, contemporary individuals can learn from the methods and techniques they employed to fashion identities which were appropriate to them.

Cultivating an ability to make choices is a way of giving orientation to reason, and it can be helpful to draw further on navigational imagery and to contrast orientation by means of the polestar with orientation by means of a compass. The polestar is a fixed point in the distance, upon which the traveller – or, as here, the inquirer – sets their sights. In the present context what this corresponds to is what Kant called a regulative ideal. Nirvāṇa and *mokṣa* are regulative ideals; so too perhaps is the ideal life of a Buddha or a sage. The important point is that, although you might *take aim* at them as a way of giving direction to your choices, it is not necessary that you should expect ever to *arrive* there. Orientation by means of a compass is quite different. What it corresponds to in the domain of practical reason is the use of maxims and heuristic principles in making decisions. Just as you can use a compass even in deep fog, when your destination is not visible, so you can let moral rules-of-thumb be your guide in the course of deciding what to do.

Another side of the place of reason in fashioning identities is the way that the resources of reason can make internal dissent possible, and so permit the calling into question of traditional values themselves. This is especially the case with respect to the broad family of culturally similar traditions that is Hinduism, for Hinduism has often been regarded by its opponents as intolerant of dissent and by its proponents as speaking with a single voice. Of many sceptical voices within Hinduism, I will mention in Chapter 5 one which challenges the moral authority of the Vedas on rational grounds. The argument appeals to broad principles of rational interpretation: the Vedas, it is said, are verifiably mistaken, internally inconsistent, and pointlessly repetitious (*Nyāya-sūtra* 2.1.57). As speech-acts, the argument continues, they resemble the delusional ramblings of a drunkard; they carry no epistemological authority. An uncharitable view of religious tolerance might lead one to expect this sceptical argument to be met with censure and condemnation, but in fact it is joined in argument. Other principles of rational interpretation are advanced that resolve the inconsistencies and explain the repetitions, and a justification of the assent-worthiness of the Vedic pronouncements is sought in a general

epistemology of testimony. In Chapters 8 and 9, I will isolate still other sources of dissent within Indian culture, describing in particular perhaps the most radical and sophisticated dissenter of all, Śrīharṣa.

An important contrast within mainstream Hinduism is reflected in the differential use of the terms *hetu*, 'evidence-based rationality', and *tarka*, 'hypothesis-based rationality'. Manu, the author of the most influential of the lawbooks, is disappointingly unequivocal in his criticism of the unconstrained use of evidence-based reason (Manu 2.10–11), but what is overlooked in the standard criticism of him as an 'orthodox' thinker is the fact that he is considerably more willing to allow a place for hypothesis-based rationality (Manu 12.106). A careful examination of the resources of such rationality reveals that there is an underlying model of considerable flexibility and power (Chapter 6). This model of rationality is based on two sorts of principle: i) principles for the selection of paradigmatic cases or exemplars, and ii) principles for the mapping of truths about the paradigms onto truths about other cases, based on rules of adaptation and substitution. One might imagine how one reasons when one is trying to change the battery in a new car, a process that involves remembering the procedure that worked for the old car, and adapting it to fit the different layout and design of the new one. Clearly this 'blueprint + adaptation' model is situational and particularist. I believe that it came to serve as the basis of a general theory of moral reasoning, leaving behind its origins in the hermeneutics of ritual. And, as many texts make clear, it makes possible the existence of dissent and disagreement, for different decisions about what counts as an appropriate adaptation, and also what counts as a relevant paradigm, can always be advanced and defended (compare with the dialecticians' concept of *jāti*, reasoning about appropriate and inappropriate resemblance, Chapter 4). As a resource to be drawn upon in reasoning about one's choices, the model is a highly versatile one. The details of this theory are found in works of Dharmaśāstra and Mīmāṃsā, especially in Kumārila's *Tantravārttika* and in commentaries on the *Manusmṛti*. Such a model might have informed Gandhi's understanding of ethics, for, as Akeel Bilgrami has suggested, an ethics based on the exemplary role of particular acts is central to Gandhi's conception of moral identity.[34]

Public reasoning under a secular constitution demands a framework which is symmetrical or unbiased in its accommodation of a plurality of evaluative standpoints. Buddhist dialecticians have done important

[34] Akeel Bilgrami, 'Gandhi's Integrity: The Philosophy Behind the Politics', *Postcolonial Studies* 5 (2002), pp. 79–93.

theoretical work here (Chapters 1, 3). The tolerance of diversity of the 3rd century BCE Buddhist emperor Aśoka is well known, and the Council he convened with the purpose of settling doctrinal disputes between different Buddhist groups was run according to a codified theory of impartial dialogue. Debate is so structured as to give each party a fair and equal opportunity to rehearse their arguments, and for counter-arguments to be presented. Guiding the entire debate is an endeavour, not to find a winner and a loser, but to tease out the hidden assumptions that may lie in the background of some given position, so that there can be a clarification of what is at stake and what each party is committed to. The policy of making debates have the clarification of commitments as their function, rather than confrontation, victory, and defeat, has important advantages. One is that it is easier to concede, if one comes to see that one's position rests on hidden commitments that one would not endorse. There can be progress in public reasoning without having to be winners and losers. The text which Aśoka's dialectians produced is called the *Elements of Dialogue*. Much later, in the seventeenth century, the Jaina philosopher Yaśovijaya espoused a doctrine of public reason based on the intellectual values of neutrality (*madhyasthatā*) and 'groundedness in all views' (*sarvanayāśraya*). He argues that the practice of such values is what distinguishes reasoned public dialogue from empty quarrelling. I have discussed his theory elsewhere.[35]

If neutrality is one requirement of public reasoning, another is that there be common ground. Indian theoreticians describe this shared ground as the *dṛṣṭānta* or *udāharaṇa*; I will call it the 'anchor' in a debate. Anchors are what ensure that acts of public reasoning have a grounding in participants' experience, that what is disputed and what is implied are tied to their frames of reference. At one level, this is simply a reflection of the 'blueprint + adaptation' model of decision-making, shifted from the domain of individual deliberation to the domain of public reason (from *svārtha* to *parārtha*, in the terminology of the Indian theorists). Any given case that is to serve as the starting point in a public discussion must be such that its relevant features are agreed upon by all participants to the dialogue; otherwise, the act of public reasoning will not even get off the ground. So the existence of anchors is a requirement in an act of public reasoning. As I will show in Chapter 4, it is possible to develop an account

[35] Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 3.

of anchoring from ideas described in the ancient Ritual Sūtras as well as in early Nyāya sources.

I have been arguing that the full range of resources from intellectual India, as well as from other intellectual traditions, is available in the fashioning of modern identities. J. L. Mehta has said about one such resource, the Ṛg-veda, that, 'We in India still stand within that *Wirkundsgeschichte* and what we make of that text and how we understand it today will itself be a happening within that history'.[36] I propose to generalise what Mehta says, so as to include all the texts and traditions of India, and to broker identities in the global diaspora as well as in India itself. One clear example of this is in the work of an exemplary intellectual Indian, Bimal Krishna Matilal, who is what I will describe as a 'situated interpreter' of India, drawing on its resources to fashion a contemporary cosmopolitan intellectual identity (see Chapters 14 and 15). Situated interpretation is a way to enrich the present through an analysis of the past, all the while remaining acutely sensitive to the fact that the context and circumstances of the present-day thinker are radically different from those of the ancient writers whose work one seeks to analyse. I will end the book by saying something more about what lies behind what Sen has called the 'extraordinary neglect of Indian works on reasoning, science, mathematics',[37] and the concomitant thoroughgoing denial of Indian intellectual originality.

[36] J. L. Mehta, 'The Ṛgveda: Text and Interpretation', in his *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi: ICPR, 1990), p. 278.

[37] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 80.

1

An Ideal of Public Reason

Public acts of reason are a defining characteristic of the intellectual world of ancient India.[1] I begin my study by examining what the ancient world understood to constitute these practices. Debates were held on a great variety of matters – philosophical, scientific and theological – and quite soon the debates become formal affairs, with reputations at stake and socially important issues in the balance. Already in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (c. 7th century BCE), we find the sage Yājñavalkya being quizzed by king Janaka on tricky intellectual puzzles:[2]

> Once, when Janaka, the king of Videha, was formally seated, Yājñvalkya came up to him. Janaka asked him: 'Yājñvalkya, why have you come? Are you after cows, or subtle disquisitions?' He replied: '*Both*, your majesty.'

What followed was a question-and-answer dialogue in which Janaka interrogates the sage, not only to solicit information but to test Yājñavalkya's mettle. The sage had earlier given to Janaka the right to ask him any question. Yājñavalkya can release himself from this obligation to answer only when he has fully satisfied Janaka's curiosity:

> [Janaka] 'Here, sire, I'll give you a thousand cows! But you'll have to tell me more than that to get yourself released!' At this point

[1] See Phyllis Granoff, 'Scholars and Wonder-workers', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, 3 (1985), pp. 459–67; Esther A. Solomon, 'Actual Debates and Controversies', in *Indian Dialectics*, vol. 2 (Ahmedabad: B. J. Institute of Learning and Research, 1978), pp. 833–75.

[2] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (BU) 4.1.1. Trans. Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads: An Annotated Text and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

> Yājñvalkya became alarmed, thinking: 'The king is really sharp! He has flushed me out of every cover.'[3]

It is in fact a characteristic of the earliest recorded debates that they take the form of question-and-answer dialogues. As a form of debate, the goal of such a dialogue is not restricted merely to one party soliciting information from another, for there are, as this dialogue shows, elements too of testing one's opponent and of cross-checking what he or she says.

Public Reason in the *Questions of Milinda*

A particularly important early question-and-answer dialogue is the *Milinda-pañhā*, or *Questions of Milinda*.[4] It records the encounter between a Buddhist monk, Nāgasena, and Milinda, also known as Menander, an Indo-Bactrian king who ruled the part of India that had fallen under Greek influence at the time of Alexander's Indian campaign. The document dates from around the first century CE, although Milinda's reign was earlier, 155–130 BCE. At the outset, Nāgasena insists that their dialogue be conducted as a proper scholarly debate and not merely sycophantically:[5]

> **Milinda**: Reverend Sir, will you discuss with me again?
>
> **Nāgasena**: If your Majesty will discuss (*vāda*) as a scholar, well, but if you will discuss as a king, no.
>
> **Milinda**: How is it then that scholars discuss?
>
> **Nāgasena**: When scholars talk a matter over one with another, then is there a winding up, an unravelling, one or other is convicted of error, and he then acknowledges his mistake; distinctions are drawn, and contra-distinctions; and yet thereby they are not angered. Thus do scholars, my king, discuss.
>
> **Milinda**: And how do kings discuss?

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[3] BU 4.3.33–4.

[4] *Milinda-pañhā*. V. Trenckner (ed.) (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1928). Trans. I. B. Horner, *Milinda's Questions*, 2 vols (London: Pali Text Society, 1963–1964).

[5] Another distinction will be drawn by Caraka, a medical theorist, and an important source of information about ancient Indian logic. In an echo of *Meno* 7.5 c–d, he says that debate (*saṃbhāṣā*) among specialists is of two types, friendly (*sandhāya*) and hostile (*vigṛhya*) – a cooperation or a fight (*Caraka-Saṃhitā* 3.8.16–17).

Nāgasena: When a king, your majesty, discusses a matter, and he advances a point, if any one differ from him on that point, he is apt to fine him, saying 'Inflict such and such a punishment upon that fellow!' Thus, your majesty, do kings discuss.

Milinda: Very well. It is as a scholar, not as a king, that I will discuss.[6]

'Vāda', the type of dialogue Nāgasena depicts as that of the scholar, is one in which there are two parties. Each defends a position with regard to the matter in hand, and there is an 'unravelling' (*nibbeṭhanam*: an unwinding, an explanation) and a disambiguation of the positions of both – a process of revealing commitments, presumptions and faulty argument. There is also a 'winding up', ending in the censure (*niggaho*; in Sanskrit, *nigraha*) of one party, a censure based on reasons the censured will themselves acknowledge. This is a species of the persuasion dialogue, a 'conversational exchange where one party is trying to persuade the other part that some particular proposition is true, using arguments that show or prove to the respondent that the thesis is true'.[7] Indeed, it would seem to be the species that has come to be known as the 'critical discussion,' a persuasion dialogue in which the conflict is resolved 'only if somebody retracts his doubt because he has been convinced by the other party's argumentation or if he withdraws his standpoint because he has realised that his argumentation cannot stand up to the other party's criticism'.[8] Not every persuasion dialogue need end in one party recognising defeat, for an important function of the general persuasion dialogue is to be *maieutic*, helping each side to clarify the nature of their commitments and the presuppositions upon which their positions depend.[9] In the to-and-fro of such a dialogue, each party is allowed to retract earlier commitments, as it becomes clear what the consequences of such a commitment would be. This maieutic, clarificatory function of dialogue is perhaps what Nāgasena intends when he speaks of an 'unravelling', and it seems clearer

[6] *Milinda-pañhā* 2.1.3.

[7] Douglas Walton, *The New Dialectic: Conversational Contexts of Argument* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p. 37.

[8] Frans Van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, *Argumentation, Communication and Fallacies* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992), p. 34.

[9] Walton, *The New Dialectic*, p. 48.

still in his characterisation of deliberation or investigation (*vikāra*) as a 'threshing-out':[10]

Milinda: What is the distinguishing characteristic, Nāgasena, of reflection (*vitakka*)?
Nāgasena: The effecting of an aim.
Milinda: Give me an illustration.
Nāgasena: It is like the case of a carpenter, great king, who fixes in a joint a well-fashioned piece of wood. Thus it is that the effecting of an aim is the mark of reflection.
Milinda: What is the distinguishing characteristic, Nāgasena, of investigation (*vikāra*)?
Nāgasena: Threshing out again and again.
Milinda: Give me an illustration.
Nāgasena: It is like the case of the copper vessel, which, when it is beaten into shape, makes a sound again and again as it gradually gathers shape. The beating into shape is to be regarded as reflection and the sounding again and again as investigation. Thus it is, great king, that threshing out again and again is the mark of investigation.
Milinda: Very good, Nāgasena.

So it is through reflection and deliberation that the parties to an investigation together thrash out a position. Nāgasena tells us very little about the sort of argumentation that is appropriate, and we can learn little more about argument within persuasion dialogues from the *Questions of Milinda,* although Milinda's repeated request to be given an illustration is suggestive of the importance that would later be attached to the citation of examples in good argumentation.[11]

And yet there is still something to learn. For the dialogue of the *Questions of Milinda* is not, contrary to Nāgasena's initial statement, a straightforwardly scholarly debate, but proceeds instead with his being interrogated at the hands of Milinda. Ostensibly Milinda wishes to be informed as to the answer to a range of thorny ethical and metaphysical questions, but his questioning is not so innocent, and at times he

[10] *Milinda-pañhā* 2.3.13–14.

[11] I will further discuss the clarificatory function of public discourse in Chapter 3.

seems intent on entrapping Nāgasena in false dichotomies and leading questions. So it is said of him:

Master of words and sophistry, clever and wise
Milinda tried to test great Nāgasena's skill.
Leaving him not, again and yet again,
He questioned and cross-questioned him, until
His own skill was proved foolishness.[12]

Milinda is here significantly described as a 'master of sophistry' or *vetaṇḍī*, a practitioner of the dialogue form known as *viṭaṇḍā*, a 'refutation-only' dialogue in which the opponent defends no thesis of his own but is set only on refuting that of the proponent. The implication here is that such dialogues are essentially eristic. And it is, in particular, the eristic use of questioning that Milinda is a master of. Questions need not be innocent requests for information; they can also be disguised arguments. To reply to the question 'When did you stop lying?' at all, affirmatively or negatively, is already to commit oneself to the 'premise' of the question, that one has indeed been lying.

In the intellectual environment of ancient India, when interrogative dialogue was commonplace, it was very well known that questions can be used to entrap the unwitting, and counter-strategies are invented to avoid entrapment. The Buddha himself is well aware that replying to a yes–no question can commit one to a proposition, whatever answer one gives, and his solution, famously, is to refuse to answer at all. So when asked a series of ten leading questions – Is the soul eternal? Is it non-eternal? and so forth – the Buddha declines to offer a reply, for any reply would commit him, against his wish, to the existence of souls. In the *Questions of Milinda*, we see Nāgasena experimenting with a different technique to avoid entrapment. To some of Milinda's more devious yes–no questions, instead of simply refusing to reply at all, Nāgasena replies, 'Neither yes nor no'! For example:

Milinda: He who is born, Nāgasena, does he remain the same or become another?
Nāgasena: Neither the same nor another.
Milinda: Give me an illustration.

[12] *Milinda-pañhā* 4.1.1.

Nāgasena: Now what do you think, O king? You were once a baby, a tender thing, and small in size, lying flat on your back. Was that the same as you who are now grown up?

Milinda: No. That child was one, I am another.

Nāgasena: If you are not that child, it will follow that you have had neither mother nor father, no! nor teacher. You cannot have been taught either learning, or behaviour, or wisdom. . . . Suppose a man, O king, were to light a lamp, would it burn the night through?

Milinda: Yes, it might do so.

Nāgasena: Now, is it the same flame that burns in the first watch of the night, Sir, and in the second?

Milinda: No.

Nāgasena: Or the same that burns in the second watch and the third?

Milinda: No.

Nāgasena: Then there is one lamp in the first watch, and another in the second, and another in the third?

Milinda: No. The light comes from the same lamp all the night through.

Nāgasena: Just so, O king, is the continuity of a person or thing maintained. One comes into being, another passes away; and the rebirth is, as it were, simultaneous. Thus neither as the same nor as another does a man go on to the last phase of his self-consciousness.[13]

The 'premise' of the question, that to change is to cease to be, is very effectively refuted with a 'neither yes nor no' reply. Nāgasena first makes Milinda acknowledge that, with this as the background premise, answering either 'yes' or 'no' leads to an absurdity. For if he is strictly identical to the child, then he must share that child's properties; and if he is different, then he cannot. Having exposed the false premise, Nāgasena rejects it in favour of the view that persistence through time requires not strict identity but causal continuity.

Another tactic Nāgasena employs is to answer 'Both yes and no'! Here is an example:

Milinda: Does memory, Nāgasena, always arise subjectively, or is it stirred up by suggestion from outside?

[13] *Milinda-pañhā* 2.2.1.

Nāgasena: Both the one and the other.
Milinda: But does not that amount to all memory being subjective in origin, and never artificial?
Nāgasena: If, my king, there were no artificial [imparted] memory, then artisans would have no need of practice, or art, or schooling, and teachers would be useless. But the contrary is the case.
Milinda: Very good, Nāgasena.[14]

Here the question's hidden premise is that memories are caused either wholly by what goes on in the mind or wholly by factors external to it, and the 'both yes and no' reply makes plain that what ought to be said is that memories are wholly caused either by what goes on in the mind or by factors external to it, but not caused wholly by one or the other. Again, subsidiary argumentation exposes the absurdity in replying with an unqualified 'yes' or an unqualified 'no'. It was perhaps in recognition of the tactical importance of such 'neither yes nor no' and 'both yes and no' replies that it became a commonplace that there are four possible ways of responding to any question of the yes–no type, an idea that was systematised in the work of Nāgārjuna. What we see very clearly in the *Questions of King Milinda* is a sophisticated early appreciation of the pragmatics of public dialogue.

An Ideal of Public Reason in the *Nyāya-sūtra*

In the *Nyāya-sūtra* there is a more systematic discussion of the categories and methods of debate than in earlier debating manuals. Three kinds of debate are distinguished: good or honest debate (*vāda*); tricky or sophistical debate (*jalpa*); and a refutation-only debate (*vitaṇḍā*).

> Good debate (*vāda*) is one in which there is proof and refutation of thesis and antithesis based on evidence (*pramāṇa*) and argumentation (*tarka*), employing the five-step schema of deduction, and without contradicting any settled opinion (*siddhānta*).
>
> Tricky debate (*jalpa*) is one in which, among the features mentioned before, proof and refutation exploit such means as quibbling (*cchala*), false rejoinders (*jāti*), and any kind of clincher or defeat situation (*nigrahasthāna*).

[14] *Milinda-pañhā* 3.6.11.

> Refutation-only debate (*vitaṇḍā*) is one in which no counter-thesis is proven.[15]

The Indian five-step inference pattern alluded to here, whose structure I will analyse in greater detail in the next chapter, is a schema for proper argumentation among disputants who are engaged in an honest, friendly, non-eristic and balanced debate; this is the ideal represented in the notion of *vāda*. In the dialectical context in which such arguments are embedded, a proponent attempts to prove a thesis and to refute the counter-thesis of the opponent, both parties drawing upon a shared body of background knowledge and received belief, and using properly accredited methods for the acquisition and consideration of evidence. The aim of each participant in the dialogue is not victory but a fair assessment of the best arguments for and against the thesis. In Indian logic, *vāda* represents an ideal of fair-minded and respectful discourse. By contrast, in a tricky debate (*jalpa*), underhanded debating tactics are allowed, and the aim is to win at all costs and by any means necessary. The third kind of debate, the refutation-only debate (*vitaṇḍā*), is the variety of dialogue preferred by the sceptics (and, it seems, also by Milinda) to argue against a thesis without commitment to any counter-thesis.

The early Nyāya writers look closely, in addition, at the characteristic method that constitutes a rational inquiry. The opening verse in the *Nyāya-sūtra* is a list of 16 items which, according to its author, Gautama, comprise the subject matter of the Nyāya system. The first two items are the various methods of knowing and the domain of knowables. They constitute the Nyāya epistemology and metaphysics. The next seven are the theoretical components in the process of critical inquiry: doubt; purpose; public examples; settled opinions; extrapolative demonstration; suppositional reasoning and a final decision. The final seven are terms of art in the theory of debate. *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.1:

> The highest goal in life is reached through knowledge about the nature of
>
> [a] knowables, methods of knowing;
>
> [b] doubt, purpose, public examples, settled opinions, the parts of a demonstration, suppositional reasoning, final decision;
>
> [c] truth-directed debate, victory-directed debate, destructive debate, sophistical rejoinders, tricks, checks, defeat situations.

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15 *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.2. 1–3. *Gautamīya-nyāya-darśana with Bhāṣya of Vātsyāyana*, critical ed. Anantalal Thakur (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1997).

A properly conducted inquiry, adds the commentator Vātsyāyana, is that by which one moves from an initial uncertainty about the nature of the thing or concept under investigation to an ascertainment of its properties. The inquiry is permitted to draw upon such data as are incontrovertible or accepted by both parties in the dispute, and it proceeds by adducing evidence or reasons in support of one side or the other. The first element here is the existence of a doubt (*saṃśaya*) which initiates the investigation. A doubt is said to be a mental state whose content is of the form 'Does this object have a certain specified property or not?' Typical doubts discussed in the *Nyāya-sūtra* (Is the soul eternal or non-eternal? Is a whole object identical with the sum of its parts?) tend to be rather abstract philosophical conjectures or hypotheses, but the method is meant to apply just as well to the resolution of empirical questions as to points of contestation in the public sphere.

An inquiry must have a purpose. The assumption is that any form of rational behaviour must have some motivating purpose, the point for which one wishes to resolve the doubt. The inquiry must appeal to publicly settled principles and empirical examples. Here what is meant by 'empirical example' (*dṛṣṭānta*) are cases to which all parties can appeal (see Chapters 3 and 4). The background principles are called 'settled opinions' (*siddhānta*), and might correspond to a category of given principles. As I described in the Introduction, Gautama actually mentions several kinds of such discursive claim. In particular, there are claims which everyone must accept, for example that objects of knowledge are established via means of knowing. Other claims are in the form of conditionals, where both parties agree on the truth of the conditional, but dispute the truth of the antecedent. Also mentioned are assumptions which are made merely for the sake of argument. One or both sides might grant some principle, simply to facilitate the inquiry. In any case, having initiated an inquiry for some purpose, and taken into consideration both empirical evidence and such doctrinal or *a priori* considerations, the investigation concludes with the decision, which is a resolution of the initiating doubt.

Interestingly similar characterisations of the general structure of problem-solving are offered in the contemporary literature of formal heuristics.[16] There a problem is defined as one in which the following features are specified and delimited: *a goal* – a criterion of judging outcomes; *an initial state*, consisting of a situation and the resources available for the

[16] Herbert Simon and Allen Newell, *Human Problem Solving* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), pp. 71–105; Robert Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 163–74.

solution; a set of *admissible operations* for transforming states; *constraints* on states and operations and *an outcome*. It would seem that the early Nyāya account fits rather nicely this characterisation of the structure of a problem-solving setup. The doubt is an initial state of uncertainty: the purpose is the goal; the admissible operations are the sanctioned methods of reasoning by extrapolative demonstration and supposition (*tarka*); the constraints are the 'examples' or 'anchors' and the settled views to which all parties agree and the outcome is the final decision. A critical inquiry in the style of Nyāya, then, can be regarded as a formal heuristic for problem-solving, one in which transparency – openness to public scrutiny – is the most prized virtue.

The practice of public reason as codified in the ancient *Nyāya-sūtra* (as well as in a variety of Buddhist debate manuals such as the *Vāda-nyāya*) has enjoyed an extraordinary longevity in India. Fascinating and often amusing details of a few celebrated debates have been recorded in the Sanskrit literature,[17] and the practice was still flourishing at the time of Akbar. The refined use of Nyāya rational method was very much alive in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century India, especially in Vārāṇasī (Benares) and in Navadvīpa (Nadia, a town near modern Kolkata). A document exists which records how Vidyānivāsa, one of the most important Nyāya philosophers of the time, engaged with the great Mīmāṃsā scholar Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa in a public debate at the house of Ṭoḍarmal, Akbar's finance minister from 1572 to 1589. The report is from a history of the family of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa written by his son, and has been related as follows:

> At a *śrāddha* ceremony in Dehli in the house of Toḍar Mal, he [Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa] worsted in disputation all the Paṇḍits of Gauda and Mithilā with Vidyānivāsa at their head. Toḍar Mal was a patron of Sanskrit literature, having caused excellent compilations in *smṛti*, *jyotisha*, *vaidyaka* and other *śāstras*. He was long the Subahdar of Bengal. It is not unnatural, therefore, that he should invite Bengal Paṇḍits at a *śrāddha*. Vidyānivāsa was then the leading Paṇḍit at Navadvīpa. He was a Banerji. His father Vidyā-vāchaspati is described as one whose feet were constantly rubbed by the crown jewels of Rājās. Vidyānivāsa's sons were all well-known Paṇḍits. His second son was the author of the *Bhāṣā-pariccheda*, a standard work of Nyāya all over India. His third son was in high favour with Bhāva

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17 See Esther A. Solomon, 'Actual Debates and Controversies'.

> Siṃha, the son of Mān Siṃha of Amber. Even Vidyānivāsa had to yield his palm to Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa and the point of debate was one of vital importance to modern Brāhmanism. The ancient ṛṣis declare that at the performance of a *śrāddha*, live brāhmans are to be fed with the cooked food offered by the manes [sic]. Bengal holds that this is impossible in the Kāliyuga as there are no Brāhmans worthy to feed. And so they feed symbolical Brāhmans (Brāhmans made of *kuśā–grass*). The southern people [Nārāyaṇa was from the south] hold that the injunctions of the *śrāddha* should be respected, and live Brāhmans are to be fed.[18]

That an act of public reason should so be held, pertaining to a point of some subtlety in Hinduism, but conducted according to principles intelligible to all, and with the full support of Islamic patronage, makes this report of more than merely historical interest. [19] In the next chapters I will begin to elaborate a theoretical framework for our understanding of such negotiations within public space.

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[18] M. M. Hariprasād Śāstrī, 'Dakshini Pandits at Benares', *Indian Antiquary* XLI (1912), pp. 7–13. See also James Benson, 'Śaṃkarabhaṭṭa's Family Chronicle: The *Gādhivaṃśa-varṇana*', in Axel Michaels (ed.), *The Paṇḍit: Traditional Scholarship in India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001).

[19] For further discussion see Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 4.

2

Ancient Indian Logic As a Theory of Case-Based Reasoning

> Why is a single instance, in some cases, sufficient for a complete induction, while in others myriads of concurring instances, without a single exception known or presumed, go such a very little way towards establishing a universal proposition? Whoever can answer this question knows more of the philosophy of logic than the wisest of the ancients.
>
> – John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*

A Model of Reasoning in the *Nyāya-sūtra*

It was a correspondent of John Stuart Mill, the pioneering Sanskrit scholar Henry Colebrooke, who first brought Indian logic to the attention of the English philosophical world, announcing in a famous lecture to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1824 his discovery of what he dubbed 'the Hindu syllogism'.[1] Colebrooke's discovery consists in fact in a translation of an ancient Indian treatise, indeed one I have already mentioned: the *Nyāya-sūtra*. It dates from around the first or second century CE, and is said to be the work of Gautama or Akṣapāda. Some scholars are now inclined to regard it as the amalgamation of two earlier works on philosophical

[1] H. T. Colebrooke, 'On the Philosophy of the Hindus: Part II – On the Nyāya and Vaiśeshika Systems', *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 (1824), pp. 92–118, reprinted in Jonardon Ganeri (ed.), *Indian Logic: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001).

method: one a treatise on the rules and principles of debate; the other a discussion of more general issues in epistemology and metaphysics.[2] In a section on the proper way for debaters to set out their argument, the *Nyāya-sūtra* prescribes a five-step schema for sound argumentation, and it is this schema that Colebrooke identified as the Hindu syllogism. We now know much more than Colebrooke about the historical development of Indian logic. He, for instance, was unaware of the informal logic and anticipations of propositional calculus in the *Elements of Dialogue* (about which see Chapter 3), or the theories of the Buddhists Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti on formal criteria for inference.[3] And scholars had yet to learn the complexities of the early modern achievements of Navya-Nyāya, with its intriguing treatment of negation, logical consequence and quantification, and even, as Daniel Ingalls has shown in his pioneering book, the formulation of De Morgan's Laws.[4] Nevertheless, despite Colebrooke's lack of acquaintance with the historical context, he and those who followed him were right to see the *Nyāya-sūtra* as a treatise of fundamental importance to Indian rational theory. As I will show here, the *Nyāya-sūtra* represents an ancient stratum or *epistème* in Indian thinking about thinking. In this it stands prior to a fundamental transformation that would take place across two inter-related dimensions: first, in the beginnings of a shift of interest away from the place of argumentation within dialectic and debate and towards a greater concern with more formal properties of sound inference; and, second, in a parallel and correlated shift from case-based to rule-governed accounts of logical reasoning. The logic of *ancient* India, as exemplified in the *Nyāya-sūtra*, is, I contend, an informal logic of situated case-based reasoning.

The aim, in a good debate between friends, is the assessment of the best arguments for or against the thesis. And that leads to the question: *how* are arguments to be assessed or evaluated? Are the criteria for assessment formal, to do only with the form of the argument schema itself; or are they informal, pragmatic criteria, according to which arguments have to

[2] Annette Meuthrath, *Untersuchungen zur Kompositionsgeschichte der Nyāyasūtras* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1996).

[3] I discuss these theories in my *Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2001), chapter 4.

[4] D. H. H. Ingalls, *Materials for the Study of Navya-Nyāya Logic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 65–7. See also my *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapters 15, 16.

be evaluated as good or bad with regard to their contribution towards the goals of the dialogue within which they are embedded?[5]

It is with this question in mind that we should approach the five-step proof pattern presented in the *Nyāya-sūtra*. The proper formulation of an argument is said to be in five parts: tentative statement of the thesis to be proved (*pratijñā*); citation of a reason (*hetu*); mention of an example (*udāharaṇa*); application of reason and example to the case in hand (*upanaya*); final assertion of the thesis (*nigamana*). An unseen fire is inferred to be present on the mountain on the basis of a plume of smoke, just as the two have been found associated in other places like the kitchen. The terms used here are defined in a series of admittedly rather gnomic utterances (NS 1.1.34–9):

> 1.1.32 The parts [of an argument scheme] are thesis, reason, example, application and conclusion.
>
> 1.1.33 The thesis is a statement of that which is to be proved.
>
> 1.1.34 The reason is that which proves what is to be proven in virtue of a similarity with the example.
>
> 1.1.35 Again, in virtue of a dissimilarity.
>
> 1.1.36 The example is an illustration which, being similar to that which is to be proved, has its character.
>
> 1.1.37 Or else, being opposite to it, is contrary.
>
> 1.1.38 The application to that which is to be proved is a drawing in together 'this is so' or 'this is not so', depending on the example.
>
> 1.1.39 The conclusion is a restatement of the thesis as following from the statement of the reason.[6]

The basic idea is that an object is inferred to have one, unobserved, property on the grounds that it has another, observed, one – 'there is fire on the mountain because there is smoke there'. The most distinctive aspect of

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5 Douglas Walton, *The New Dialectic: Conversational Contexts of Argument* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

6 pratijñāhetūdāharaṇopanayanigamanāny avayavāḥ. sādhyanirdeśaḥ pratijñā | udāharaṇasādharmyāt sādhyasādhanaṃ hetuḥ. tathā vaidharmyāt | sādhyasādharmyāt taddharmabhāvī dṛṣṭānta udāharaṇam. tadviparyayād vā viparītam | udāharaṇāpekṣas tathety upasāhāro na tatheti vā sādhyasyopanayaḥ | hetvapadeśāt pratijñāyāḥ punarvacanaṃ nigamanam ||

the schema, though, is the fundamental importance given to the citation of an example, a single case said either to be similar or else dissimilar to the case in hand. Suppose I want to persuade you that it is about to rain. I might reason as follows: 'Look, it is going to rain (thesis). For see that large black cloud (reason). Last time you saw a large black cloud like that one (example), what happened? Well, it's the same now (application). It is definitely going to rain (conclusion).'

Let us try to unpick these gnomic *Nyāya-sūtra* definitions. Suppose we let '*F*' denote the property that serves as the reason here (*hetu*); '*G*' the property whose presence someone is seeking to infer (*sādhya*); '*a*' the new object about which they are trying to decide if it is *G* or not (*pakṣa*); and '*b*' the cited example (*udāharaṇa*). Then we seem to have a pair of schematic inferences, one based on similarity, the other on dissimilarity:

Proof based on similarity

[thesis]	*Ga*	
[reason]	*Fa*	proves *Ga*, because *b* is similar to *a*.
[example]	*b*	has the 'character of *a*' because it is similar to *a*.
[application]		*a* is the same as *b* with respect to *G*.
[conclusion]	*Ga*	

Proof based on dissimilarity

[thesis]	*Ga*	
[reason]	*Fa*	proves *Ga*, because *b* is dissimilar to *a*.
[example]	*b*	does not have the 'character of *a*' because it is dissimilar to *a*.
[application]		*a* is not the same as *b* with respect to *G*.
[conclusion]	*Ga*	

A counter-proof follows the same pattern, proving the counter-thesis ($\neg$ *Ga*) by way of a different reason and example.

Counter-proof:

[thesis]	$\neg$ *Ga*	
[reason]	*F′a*	proves $\neg$ *Ga*, because *b* is similar to *a*.
[example]	*c*	has the 'character of *a*' because it is similar to *a*.
[application]		*a* is the same as *c* with respect to *G*.
[conclusion]	$\neg$ *Ga*	

This five-step schema was interpreted in a particular way by Vātsyāyana, the first commentator on the *Nyāya-sūtra*. His interpretation is largely responsible for shaping the direction Indian logic was later to take. At the same time, it is an interpretation that makes the citation of an example essentially otiose. Vātsyāyana was, in effect, to transform Indian logic away from what it had been earlier, namely a theory of inference from case to case on the basis of resemblance, and into a rule-governed account in which the citation of cases has no significant role.

The Theory Transformed

What Vātsyāyana says is that the similarity between *a* and *b* consists just in their sharing the reason property *F*. The basic pattern of inference is now: *a* is like *b* (both are *F*); $Gb \therefore Ga$. Or else: *a* is unlike *b* (only one is *F*); $\neg Gb \therefore Ga$. In a counter-proof, *a* is demonstrated to be similar in some other respect to some other example, one that lacks the property *G*. Thus, for example, a proof might be: the soul is eternal because it is uncreated, like space. And the counter-proof might run like this: the soul is non-eternal because it is perceptible, like a pot. The function of the example now is only to exemplify the proof relationship that exists between the properties *F* and *G*.[7]

The proposal is that if *a* resembles *b*, and *b* is *G*, then *a* can be inferred to be *G* too. But there is an obvious difficulty, which is that mere resemblance is an insufficient ground. Admittedly, the soul and space are both uncreated, but why should that give us any grounds for transferring the property of being eternal from one to the other? The respect in which

[7] 'udāhriyate 'nena dharmayoḥ sādhyasādhanabhāva ityudāharaṇam' *Nyāya-bhāṣya* 32.17 (under *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.36). 'dharmayoḥ sādhyasādhanabhāvapradarśanam ekatrodāharaṇārthaḥ' *Nyāya-bhāṣya* 35, 14 (under *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.39). 'vyavasthite hi khalu dharmayoḥ sādhyasādhanabhāve dṛṣṭāntasthe gṛhyamāṇe sādhanabhūtasya dharmasya hetutvenopādānā na sādharmyamātrasyaṃ na vaidharmyamātrasya veti' *Nyāya-bhāṣya* 35, 19–21 (under *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.39). *Nyāya-sūtra* 5.1.34 is similar: dṛṣṭānte ca sādhyasādhanabhāvena prajñātasya dharmasya hetutvāt tasya cobhayathābhāvān nāviśeṣaḥ, 'because a reason is a property recognized in the example as being in the nature of a proof relation, and because it has the nature of both [similarity and dissimilarity], [there is] no lack of distinction [between good and bad arguments]'; but this may only add support to the conjecture that Book 5.1 of the *Nyāya-sūtra* is a later interpolation into the text.

the example and the case in hand resemble one another must be relevant to the property whose presence is being inferred. This is where the idea of a 'false proof' or 'false rejoinder' (*jāti*) comes in. Any argument that, while in the form of the five-step schema, fails the relevance requirement is called a 'false proof', and the *Nyāya-sūtra* has the whole fifth chapter classifying and discussing them. A 'false rejoinder' is defined in this way (NS 1.2.18): A rejoinder is an objection by means of similarity and dissimilarity.[8]

It appears to be admissible to transfer the property 'rainmaker' from one black cloud to another black cloud, but not from a black cloud to a white cloud. It appears to be admissible to transfer the property 'has a dewlap' from one cow to another cow, but not from one four-legged animal (a cow) to another (a horse). It is clear what now needs to be said. The argument is good if there exists a general relationship between the reason *F* and the property being proved, *G*, such that the former never occurs without the latter.

It seems to have been the Buddhist thinker Diṅnāga (*c.* 480–540 CE) who first made this explicit.[9] According to him, a reason must satisfy three conditions. Define a 'homologue' (*sapakṣa*) as an object other than *a* that possesses *G*, and a 'heterologue' (*vipakṣa*) as an object other than *a* that does not possess *G*. Then Diṅnāga's three conditions on a good reason, *F*, are:

[1] *F* occurs in *a*.
[2] *F* occurs in some homologue.
[3] *F* occurs in no heterologue.

Condition [3] asserts, in effect, that *F* never occurs without *G*, and this, together with [1] that *F* occurs in *a*, implies that *G* occurs in *a*. In effect, the citation of an example in the original *Nyāya-sūtra* formula has been transformed into a statement of a general relationship between *F* and *G*. There remains only a vestigial role for the example in condition [2], which seems to insist that there be an instance of *F* other than *a* which is also *G*. Diṅnāga is worried about the soundness of inferences based on a reason

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[8] sādharymavaidharmyābhyāṃ pratyavasthānā jātiḥ.

[9] Diṅnāga, *Pramāṇa-samuccaya*, in Richard Hayes, *Diṅnāga on the Interpretation of Signs* (Kluwer: Studies of Classical India, vol. 9, 1988), chapter 2.

which is a property unique to the object in hand; for example, the inference 'sound is eternal because it is audible.' For if this is a good argument, then why not the counter-argument 'sound is non-eternal because it is audible'? And yet there are many inferences like this that are indeed good, so it seems to be a mistake to exclude them all. In fact, condition [2] soon came to be re-phrased in a way that made it logically equivalent to [3], namely as saying that *F* occurs *only* in homologues (the particle *eva* 'only' used here as a quantifier). In asking for the respect in which the example and the new case must resemble each other, for the presence of *G* in the example to be a reason for inferring that *G* is present in the new case, we are led to give the general relationship that any such respect must bear to *G*, and that in turn makes citation of an example otiose. The five-step schema reduces essentially to:

[thesis]	*Ga*
[reason]	because *F*
[example]	where there is *F*, there is *G*; for example, *b*.
[application]	*Fa*
[conclusion]	*Ga*

It is the argument pattern so transformed that has suggested to Colebrooke and other writers on Indian logic a comparison with an Aristotelian syllogism in the first figure, *Barbara*. We simply re-write it in this form:

All *F* are *G*

Fa

Therefore, *Ga*

Yet this assimilation seems forced in at least two respects. First, the conclusion of the *Nyāya-sūtra* demonstration is a singular proposition. In Aristotle's system, on the other hand, it is always either a universal proposition with 'all' or 'no', or a particular proposition with 'some'. Second, and relatedly, the role of the 'minor term' is quite different: in the Indian schema, it indicates a locus for property-possession, while in Aristotle, the relation is 'belongs to'. Again, in reducing the Indian pattern to an Aristotelian syllogism, the role of the example, admittedly by now rather vestigial, is made altogether to disappear.

A rather better reformulation of the five-step schema is suggested by Stanisław Schayer,[10] who wants to see the schema as really a proof exploiting two rules of inference:

[thesis]	Ga	There is fire on *a* (= on this mountain).
[reason]	Fa	There is smoke on *a*.
['example']	$(\forall x)(Fx \to Gx)$	For every locus *x*: if there is smoke in *x* then there is fire in *x*.
[application]	$Fa \to Ga$	This rule also applies for $x = a$.
[conclusion]	Ga	Because the rule applies to $x = a$ and the statement *Ga* is true, the statement *Fa* is true.

Two inference rules are in play here: a rule of substitution, allowing us to infer from '$(\forall x)\zeta x$' to 'ζa'; and a rule of separation, allowing us to infer from '$\theta \to \phi$' and 'θ' to 'ϕ'. Schayer thereby identifies the Indian schema with a proof in a natural deduction system.[11]

Retrieving the Ancient Case-Based Model

I have shown how the *Nyāya-sūtra* model of good argumentation came to be transformed and developed by later writers in the Indian tradition in the direction of a formal, rule-governed theory of inference, and how writers in the West have interpreted what they have called the 'Hindu syllogism'. I suggested at the beginning that we might try to interpret the ancient Nyāya model along different lines altogether, seeing it as an early attempt at what is now called 'case-based reasoning'. Case-based reasoning begins with one or more prototypical exemplars of a category, and reasons that some new object belongs to the same category on the grounds that it resembles in some appropriate and context-determined manner one of the exemplars.

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[10] S. Schayer, 'Altindische Antizipationen der Aussagenlogik', *Bulletin international de l'Academie Polonaise des Sciences et des Lettres, classe de philologies*, 1933, pp. 90–6; S. Schayer, 'Über die Methode der Nyāya-Forschung', in O. Stein and W. Gambert (eds), *Festschrift für Moritz Winternitz* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1933), pp. 247–57; both translated by Joerg Tuske in Jonardon Ganeri (ed.), *Indian Logic: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[11] Thesis: *Ga* because *Fa*.

Proof:	(1)	Fa	Premise
	(2)	$(\forall x)(Fx \to Gx)$	Premise
	(3)	$Fa \to Ga$	2, by $\forall$ Elimination (substitution)
	(4)	Ga	1 & 3, by $\to$ Elimination (separation). QED.

As I will describe more fully in Chapter 4, models of case-based reasoning have been put forward for medical diagnostics and legal reasoning, and some have been implemented in artificial intelligence models. Perhaps something like this underlies a lot of the way human beings actually reason, and perhaps it was as an attempt to capture this type of reasoning that we should see the ancient logic of the *Nyāya-sūtra* and indeed also that of the medical theorist Caraka. In this model, a perceived association between symptoms in one case provides a reason for supposing there to be an analogous association in other, resembling cases. The physician observing a patient, A, who has, for example, eaten a certain kind of poisonous mushroom, sees a number of associated symptoms displayed, among them *F* and *G*, say. He or she now encounters a second patient, B, displaying a symptom at least superficially resembling *F*. The physician thinks back over her past case histories in search of cases with similar symptoms. She now seeks to establish if any of those past cases resembles B, and on inquiry into B's medical history, discovers that B too has consumed the same kind of poisonous mushroom as A. These are her grounds for inferring that B too will develop the symptom *G*, a symptom that had been found to be associated with *F* in A. A common ætiology in the two cases leads to a common underlying disorder, one that manifests itself in and explains associations between members of a symptom-cluster.

Can we find such a model of the informal logic of case-based reasoning in the *Nyāya-sūtra*? Consider again 1.1.34. It said that 'the reason is that which proves what is to be proved in virtue of a similarity with the example'. On my reading what this says is that a similarity between the symptom *F* in the new case and a resembling symptom *F′* in the past case or example is what grounds the inference. And 1.1.36 says that 'the example is something which, being similar to that which is to be proved, has its character'. My reading is that the old case and the new share something in their circumstances, like having eaten the same kind of poisonous mushroom, in virtue of which they share a 'character'', an underlying disorder that explains the clustering of symptoms. So the five-step demonstration is now:

[thesis]	*Ga*	
[reason]	*Fa*	*F* is similar to *F′* in *b*.
[example]	*b*	exhibits the same underlying structure as *a*, because it resembles *a*.
[application]		*a* is the same as *b* with respect to *G*.
[conclusion]	*Ga*	

We can test to see if this pattern fits examples of good inference taken from a variety of early Indian logical texts. One pattern of inference, cited in the *Nyāya-sūtra*, is *causal-predictive*: seeing the ants carrying their eggs, one infers that it will rain; seeing a full and swiftly flowing river, one infers that it has been raining; seeing a cloud of smoke, one infers the existence of an unseen fire. Presumably the idea is that one has seen other ants carrying their eggs on a past occasion, and on that occasion it rained. The inference works if, or to the extent that, we have reasons for thinking that those ants and these share some unknown capacity, a capacity that links detection of the imminent arrival of rain with the activity of moving their eggs. The pattern is similar in another kind of inference, inference from *sampling*: inferring from the salty taste of one drop of seawater that the whole sea is salty; inferring that all the rice is cooked on tasting one grain. The assumption again is that both the sampled grain of rice and any new grain share some common underlying structure, a structure in virtue of which they exhibit the syndromes associated with being cooked, and a structure whose presence in both is indicated by their being in the same pan, heated for the same amount of time, and so forth.

It is clear that background knowledge is essentially involved in these patterns of case-based reasoning. As the *Nyāya-sūtra* stresses in its definition of a good debate, both parties in a debate must be able to draw upon a commonly accepted body of information, the 'anchor' of the debate. Such knowledge gets implicated in judgements about which similarities are indicative of common underlying disorders, and which are not. Furthermore, in such reasoning the example or anchor does not seem to be redundant or eliminable in favour of a general rule. For although there will be a general law relating the underlying disorder with its cluster of symptoms, the whole point of this pattern of reasoning is that the reasoner need not be in a position to know what the underlying disorder is, and so what form the general law takes. It does not serve as an explicit premise in the inference.

While historically logic in India underwent a transformation towards formalisation, the logic of *ancient* India tries to model informal patterns of reasoning from cases, and this is a style of reasoning that is increasingly becoming recognised as widespread and representative of the way much actual reasoning takes place. Moreover, I contend that much moral deliberation and practical reasoning in ancient India follows the case-based paradigm, a claim I will argue for in detail in later chapters. Before doing so, however, I want to examine a second exemplary ancient analysis of the nature of public reason, this from an early Buddhist source.

3

Neutrality: A Theory from the Time of Aśoka

A Buddhist Treatise on Public Reason: *The Elements of Dialogue*

The *Kathāvatthu,* or the *Elements of Dialogue,*[1] is a theory of balanced rational public debate dating from the time of the Buddhist emperor Aśoka's Council, the third century BCE. It describes for the benefit of adherents to various Buddhist schisms the proper method to be followed in conducting a critical discussion into an issue of doctrinal conflict. Recent scholarship has largely focused on the question of the extent to which there is, in the *Elements of Dialogue*, an 'anticipation' of results in propositional logic.[2] For, while it is true that the formulation of arguments there is termlogical rather than propositional, and true also that propositional rules are nowhere formulated in the abstract, the codified argumentation clearly

[1] *Kathāvatthu*, Arnold C. Taylor (ed), Pali Text Society, text series nos. 48, 49 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, vol. I, first published 1894; vol. II, first published 1897; combined reprint 1979). Trans. S. Z. Aung and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Points of Controversy, or, Subjects of Discourse: Being a Translation of the Kathāvatthu from the Abhidhammapiṭaka*. Pali Text Society, translation series no. 5 (London: Luzac & Co., reprint 1960).

[2] S. Schayer, 'Altindische Antizipationen der Aussagenlogik', *Bulletin international de l'Academie Polonaise des Sciences et des Lettres, classe de philologies* 1933, pp. 90–6; J. M. Bochenski, *A History of Formal Logic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961); Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Character of Logic in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

exploits manipulations that trade on the definition of material implication, on contraposition, and on at least one of *modus tollens*, *modus ponens* and *reductio ad absurdum*. The preoccupation with this question of anticipation assumes, however, a methodology for the interpretation of Indian theories of rationality that suffers a number of serious disadvantages. For, first, in presupposing that the only matter of interest is the extent to which a given text displays recognition of principles of formal logic, the methodology fails to ask what it was that the authors themselves were trying to do, and, in consequence, is closed to the possibility that these texts contribute to logical studies of a different kind; and, second, in supposing that arguments have to be evaluated formally, the important idea that there are *informal* criteria for argument evaluation is neglected.

In fact, the *Elements of Dialogue* offers a particularly clear example of a text whose richness and interest lies elsewhere than in its anticipation of deductive principles and propositional laws. As a meticulous analysis of the argumentation properly to be used in the course of a dialogue of a specific type, its concern is with the pragmatic account of argument evaluation, the idea that arguments have to be evaluated as good or bad with regard to their contribution towards the goals of the dialogue within which they are embedded. The leading concern of the *Elements of Dialogue* is with issues of balance and fairness in the conduct of a dialogue, and it recommends a strategy of argumentation which guarantees that both parties to a point of controversy have their arguments properly weighed and considered. It is important, in the normative framework of the *Elements of Dialogue*, that there is a distinction between the global aim of the dialogue as a whole – here to rehearse in an even-handed manner all the considerations that bear upon an issue of dispute, to clarify what is at stake even if no final resolution is achieved – and the local aim of each participant, to advocate the stance they adopt with regard to that issue by supplying arguments for it and attacking the arguments of the other parties. In short, the *Elements of Dialogue* presents a singularly rich analysis of the nature of public reason.

Eight Stances in a Dialogue

A dialogue conducted in accordance with the prescribed method of the *Elements of Dialogue* is called a *vādayutti*. The goal of a *vādayutti* is the reasoned examination (*yutti*; Skt. *yukti*) of a controversial point in and through a non-eristic dialogue (*vāda*; see Chapter 2). The dialogue is highly

structured, and is to be conducted in accordance with a prescribed format of argumentation. There is a given point at issue, for example, whether 'a person is known in the sense of a real and ultimate fact' (i.e. whether persons are conceived of as metaphysically irreducible selves), whether there are such things as ethically good and bad actions, and so, in general, whether A is B. A dialogue is now divided into eight subordinate dialogues, which are called 'faces' or 'stances' (*aṭṭhamukha*). These correspond to eight attitudes it is possible to adopt with regard to the point at issue. So we have:

[1] Is A B?
[2] Is A not B?
[3] Is A B everywhere?
[4] Is A B always?
[5] Is A B in everything?
[6] Is A not B everywhere?
[7] Is A not B always?
[8] Is A not B in everything?

The introduction of an explicit quantification over times, places and objects serves to determine the attitude of proponent and respondent to the point of controversy. If the issue in question is, for example, whether lying is immoral, the clarification would be as to whether that proposition is to be maintained or denied, and in either case, whether absolutely, or only as relativised in some way to circumstances, times, or agents (compare, for instance, the argument about Kauśika's moral stance in the *Mahābhārata*, which I will mention in the Conclusion). So an opening thesis here is by definition a point at issue together with an attitude towards it.

Each such 'stance' proceeds as an independent dialogue, and each is divided into five stages: the way forward (*anuloma*); the way back (*paṭikamma*); the refutation (*niggaha*); the application (*upanayana*) and the conclusion (*niggamana*). In the way forward, the proponent solicits from the respondent their endorsement of a thesis, and then tries to argue against it. In the way back, the respondent turns the tables, soliciting from the proponent their endorsement of the counter-thesis, and then trying argue against it. In the refutation, the respondent, continuing, seeks to refute the argument that the proponent had advanced against the thesis. The application and conclusion repeat and reaffirm that the proponent's argument against the respondent's thesis is unsound, while the respondent's argument against the proponent's counter-thesis is sound.

It is significant to note that there is here no pro-argumentation, either by the respondent for the thesis or by the proponent for the counter-thesis.

There is only contra-argumentation, and that in two varieties. The respondent, in the way back, supplies an argument against the proponent's counter-thesis, and in the refutation stage, against the proponent's alleged argument against the thesis. So we see here a sharp distinction between three types of argumentation:

- *Pro*-argumention – argumentation that adduces reasons in support of one's thesis.
- *Counter*-argumenation – argumentation that adduces reasons against a counter-thesis.
- *Defensive* argumentation – argumentation that defends against counter-arguments directed against one's thesis.

The respondent, having been 'attacked' in the first phase, 'counter-attacks' in the second phase, 'defends' against the initial attack in the third, and 'consolidates' the counter-attack and the defence in the fourth and fifth. The whole pattern of argumentation, it would seem, is best thought of as presumptive, that is, as an attempt to switch a burden of proof that is initially evenly distributed between the two parties. The respondent tries to put the burden of proof firmly onto the proponent by arguing against the proponent while countering any argument against him- or herself. The fact that the respondent does not offer any pro- argumentation in direct support of the thesis means that the whole pattern of argumentation is technically *ab ignorantium*; that is, argumentation of the form 'I am right because not proved wrong'. But *ab ignorantium* reasoning is not always fallacious; indeed, it is often of critical importance in swinging the argument in one's favour in the course of a dialogue.

The 'Way Forward' and the 'Way Back'

In the first stage, the way forward, the proponent elicits from the respondent an endorsement of a thesis, and then sets out to reason against it. Not any form of reasoning is allowed; indeed the *Elements of Dialogue* prescribes a very specific method of counter-argumentation. For example:

Theravādin:	Is the person (*puggala*) known as a real and ultimate fact?
[1] **Puggalavādin**:	Yes.
Theravādin:	Is the person known in the same way as a real and ultimate fact is known?

[2] **Puggalavādin**: No, that cannot be truly said.

Theravādin: Acknowledge your refutation (*niggaha*):

[3] If the person be known as a real and ultimate fact, then indeed, good sir, you should also say, the person is known in the same way as any other real and ultimate is known.

[4] That which you say here is false, namely, that we should say, 'The person is known as a real and ultimate fact', but we should not say, 'The person is known in the same way as any other real and ultimate fact is known'.

[5] If the later statement cannot be admitted, then indeed the former statement should not be admitted either.

[6] In affirming the former, while denying the latter, you are wrong.[3]

The respondent, here a puggalavādin or believer in the existence of personal selves, is asked to endorse the thesis. The proponent then attempts to draw out an implication of that thesis, an implication moreover to which the puggalavādin will not be willing to give his consent. Here the thesis that persons are thought of as metaphysically irreducible elements of the world is held to imply that knowledge of persons is knowledge of the same kind as that of other types of thing. The puggalavādin will perhaps want to draw an epistemological distinction between empirical knowledge of external objects and self-knowledge, and so will not endorse this derived proposition. And now the proponent, in a fresh wave of argumentation, demonstrates that it is inconsistent for the puggalavādin to endorse the thesis but not the derived consequence. So a counter-argument has three components: the initial thesis or *ṭhapanā* (Skt. *sthāpanā*); the derived implication, or *pāpanā*; and the demonstration of inconsistency, or *ropanā*.

It is in the demonstration of inconsistency that there seems to be an 'anticipation' of propositional logic. Of the four steps of the demonstration of inconsistency, the first, from [3] to [4], looks like an application of the definition of material implication or its term-logical equivalent.[4] The second step, from [4] to [5], looks like a derivation of the contraposed version of the conditional, a derivation that depends on the stated definition of the

[3] *Kathāvatthu* 1.1.1.

[4] Formally, (A is B) → (C is D) = defn ¬ ((A is B) & ¬ (C is D)). Notice here that an effect of soliciting from the respondent a 'no' in answer to the proponent's second question is that the negation is external and not internal. Thus, we have '¬ (C is D)' rather than '(C is ¬D)'. This what one needs in the correct definition of material implication.

conditional.[5] The final step now is an application of *modus ponens*.[6] This is how Matilal reconstructs the 'demonstration of inconsistency' stage of argumentation.[7] Earlier, Bochenski recommended a variant in which steps [3] and [4] 'together constitute a kind of law of contraposition or rather a modus tollendo tollens in a term-logical version'.[8]

A better alternative, in my view, is to see step [3] as a piece of enthymematic reasoning from the premise already given, rather than as the introduction of an additional premise. In other words, the 'if . . . then' in [3] is to be understood to signify the logical consequence relation rather than material implication. Then step [4] negates the premise in an application of *reductio ad absurdum*.[9] This new reconstruction seems more in keeping with the overall pattern of argumentation – to take the respondent's thesis and derive from it consequences the respondent will not endorse, and thereby to argue against the thesis (it also preserves the element of pragmatic repetition in the original). Here again we see that the form of argumentation in the *Elements of Dialogue* is better understood if we bear in mind the function it is intended to serve within a dialogue context.

The same dialogue context is normative, in the sense that it gives the grounds for evaluating any actual instance of such argumentation as good or bad. It seems indeed possible to interpret the 'way forward' in terms of certain concepts from contemporary argumentation theory. Hamblin introduced the idea that each participant in a dialogue has a 'commitment store', a set of propositions to which they commit themselves in the course

5 From that definition, and assuming that '&' is commutative, it follows that (A is B) → (C is D) iff ¬ (C is D) → ¬ (A is B).

6 So what we have is:

[1]	(A is B)	premise
[2]	¬ (C is D)	premise
[3]	(A is B) → (C is D)	additional premise?
[4]	¬ ((A is B) & ¬ (C is D))	3, defn. of →
[5]	¬ (C is D) → ¬ (A is B)	4, defn. of →
[6]	¬ (A is B)	2, 5, MP

7 Matilal, *The Character of Logic*, pp. 33–7.

8 Bochenski, *A History of Formal Logic*, p. 423.

9 That is:

[1],[2]	(A is B) & ¬ (C is D)	premise
[3]	(C is D)	1+2, enthymematic derivation
[4]	¬ ((A is B) & ¬ (C is D))	1+2, 3; RAA
[5]	¬ (C is D) → ¬ (A is B)	4, defn. of →
[6]	¬ ((A is B) & ¬ (C is D))	5, defn. of →

of the dialogue, primarily by asserting them directly.[10] In Hamblin's model, the commitments of each party are on public display, known to every participant in the dialogue. Walton observes that this is very often *not* the case, and employs a distinction between open or 'light-side' commitments, and veiled or 'dark-side' commitments.[11] The veiled commitments of a participant are not on public view, and might not be transparent even to that participant herself, but perhaps the participant trades on them in making certain kinds of dialogue move. Indeed it is part of what Walton calls the 'maieutic' role of dialogue to make explicit the veiled commitments of the participants, a process of clarification that is valuable even if it does not lead to the issue at stake being decided in favour of one party or the other.[12]

Something of this sort is what is being described in the initial stages of the 'way forward'. The first two steps elicit from the respondent an explicit and open commitment to two propositions. From the respective assertion and denial, these become parts of her explicit commitment store. But next, through the enthymematic argumentation that constitutes the 'derived implication' or *pāpanā*, it is made clear that the respondent has a veiled commitment to a contrary proposition. For this is shown to follow from propositions in the explicit commitment store of the respondent. Finally, the 'demonstration of inconsistency' stage of reasoning reveals this newly exposed commitment to be inconsistent with the respondent's other explicit commitments.

The overall effect is to force the respondent into a position where they must retract at least one of the propositions to which they are committed. Indeed, we can say that such a retraction is the primary goal of the way forward. The primary aim is not to disprove the thesis, but to force a retraction of commitment. So when we evaluate the argumentation used in this part of the dialogue, it is to be evaluated as good or bad with reference to how well it succeeds in forcing such a retraction, and not simply or only or even in terms of its deductive or inductive soundness. The strategic problem here is how to persuade the respondent to accept some proposition that is meant ultimately to be used to force a retraction, and the type of strategy being recommended is the one Walton calls that of 'separating', where 'two or more propositions

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[10] Charles L. Hamblin, *Fallacies* (London: Methuen, 1970).

[11] Douglas Walton, *The New Dialectic: Conversational Contexts of Argument* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 50–1.

[12] Walton, *The New Dialectic*, p. 58; cf. his *One-Sided Arguments: A Dialectical Analysis of Bias* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 34. The term 'maieutic', from *maieutikos* 'skill in midwifery', is taken from the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates describes himself as a midwife of ideas – helping us to give birth to whatever ideas are in us, and to test them for whether they are sound.

are proved separately and then eventually put together in an argument structure that is used to prove one's own thesis or argue against an opponent's'.[13] In setting out the reasoning in this way, the intention of the *Elements of Dialogue* is not to imply that precisely this sequence of arguments is sound. What is being shown is the form that any counter-argument should take. It is a description, in generic terms, of the strategic resources open to the proponent, and serves as a blueprint for any actual public dialogue.

At this point in the subsidiary dialogue that is the first opening, the burden of proof seems to lie squarely with the respondent, who is being pressured into the uncomfortable position of having to retract his stated thesis. The remaining four phases of the first opening are a summary of the strategic resources open to the respondent to recover his position, and indeed to turn the tables against the proponent. First, the way back. This is a phase of counter-attack, in which the respondent uses parallel reasoning to force the proponent too into a position of retraction with regard to the counter-thesis:

Puggalavādin: Is the person not known as a real and ultimate fact?
[1] **Theravādin**: No, it is not known.

Puggalavādin: Is it not known in the same way as any real and ultimate fact is known?
[2] **Theravādin**: No, that cannot be truly said.

Puggalavādin: Acknowledge the rejoinder (*paṭikamma*):
[3] If the person is not known as a real and ultimate fact, then indeed, good sir, you should also say: it is not known in the same way as any other real and ultimate fact is known.
[4] That which you say is false, namely, that we should say 'The person is not known as a real and ultimate fact', but we should not say 'It is not known in the same way as any other real and ultimate fact is known'.
[5] If the latter statement cannot be admitted, then indeed the former statement should not be admitted either.
[6] In affirming the former while denying the latter, you are wrong. [14]

At the end of the 'way back', if the respondent's arguments have gone well, the proponent has been pressed in the direction of retracting his commitment to the counter-thesis.

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[13] Walton, *The New Dialectic*, p. 44.

[14] *Kathāvatthu* 1.1.2.

If the respondent were to leave matters here, however, he or she would have failed in the wider aim of the stance. The aim of the stance is to shift the burden of proof decisively onto the proponent. After the second stage, however, the burden of proof is again symmetrically distributed among the parties to the dialogue – both are in a position of being pressed to retract their respective commitment. So, in the third phase, the respondent seeks, in a defensive move, to defuse the argument of the proponent that is forcing this retraction. Again, the cited reasoning is schematic; it indicates a general strategy the details of which must be worked out differently in each specific case. The distinction being drawn is the one between counter-argument and defensive riposte, a distinction that makes sense only within the normative framework of a dialogical exchange.

The first stance in the *vādayutti* has rehearsed the best argumentation that is available against someone whose attitude towards the point at issue is one of unqualified affirmation. Remember, however, the global aim of a *vādayutti* – to be the form of dialogue most conducive to a balanced examination of the best arguments, both for and against. It is the function now of the second stance to rehearse the best argumentation against someone whose attitude towards the point at issue is one of unqualified denial, and of the subsequent stances to do likewise with respect to attitudes of qualified affirmation and denial. It might turn out, at the end of this lengthy process, that one position is less susceptible to refutation than any other. Even at the end of the dialogue, however, there may be no final resolution, but an important maieutic function will have been served – the clarification of the commitments entailed by each position, of their best strategies and forms of argumentation. So indeed it is as a rich account of presumptive reasoning in dialogue, and not so much for its 'anticipations' of formal logic, that the *Elements of Dialogue* is a rewarding and valuable resource.

The *Elements of Dialogue* contributes a sophisticated model of public reasoning, the function of which is to bring different parties within a deliberation to common accord through a process that helps them understand better the presumptions on which their viewpoints rest. Although he did not have the *Elements of Dialogue* specifically in mind, Amartya Sen is right to speak of 'the tradition of public discussion that received much encouragement in both India and China from the dialogic commitment of Buddhist organisation'[15], and to see within it one of the global roots of democratic modes of public deliberation. It presents an ideal of balanced, even-handed public reason.

[15] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* (London: Allen Lane 2005; London: Penguin 2006), p. 182.

4

Local Norms: The Priority of the Particular

Rules versus Cases

What is it for your thoughts and actions to be such that you can measure them against a standard or hold them to account? What sort of thing is a norm, a standard, such that someone can say that what you do is done well or badly, that your beliefs, and the cognitive processes that lead to them, are justified or not, that the arguments by means of which you seek to convince yourself or others are sound or unsound? The suggestion I have begun to explore in the preceding chapters, and want to develop more fully now, is that we should resist the idea that standards are general principles, rules, universal precepts or the like, the suggestion that invites us to say that practical reasoning is done in accordance with universal precepts, that matters of justification are decided against universal rules of justification, and that how good or bad our arguments are is a matter only of how well they conform with sets of universal logical laws. In place of this response, I want to consider an alternative possibility: that at least some standards are not general rules but particular cases, so that the idea of 'measuring against a standard' is a matter of comparing one particular with another, looking for those resemblances among particulars in virtue of which one can say 'That was well done, and so this is well done too'. Rules will still have a part to play in this account, not as that against which particulars are measured, but rather as the measure of resemblance between particulars. And they will not be universal precepts, applicable everywhere in their full generality, but rather local indices of resemblance, extending the normative influence of a standard particular outwards from itself in a more or less widely spread neighbourhood. Normativity,

in this picture, ripples out from a plurality of local sites, fashioning itself in patterns of interference or reinforcement in ways that are situational, adaptive and open-ended. I will call such norms 'local norms'. The picture I want to develop, and will do so by reaching into India's history of reason, stands in sharp contrast with models of rationality that emerged during the European Enlightenment.

Indeed, precisely such a view is incorporated into several Indian theories of practical and public reason, where particulars are assigned a normative standing. This is especially evident in the role assigned to particulars in the 'adapt and substitute' theory of Mīmāṃsā (on which, see Chapter 6), in the function of the 'example' (*dṛṣṭānta*) in the Nyāya model of reasoned deliberation (Chapter 2), and in the significance accorded to the conduct of exemplary individuals (Chapter 7). There are, though, rough intimations of the view I have in mind in two European philosophers. In one reading of Aristotle's account of practical wisdom or *phronesis* in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, when it comes to practical reasoning about what one ought or ought not do, attending to the particularities of the case in its full complexity is better than trying only to follow general maxims (*Nic. Eth.* 1141b8–21). To do the latter, says Aristotle, is to be like the architect who tries to measure the curved flutes of a column using a rigid and inflexible ruler. What one needs is a ruler made of lead, that can bend itself to the contours of what it is measuring, so as then to serve as a template against which to check other things supposed to have the same shape (*Nic. Eth.* 1137b27–32).

Another precursor for the view I have in mind is to be found in some of Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following and family resemblance.[1] One relatively straightforward and uncomplicated way for a particular to work as a standard gives some one particular a distinguished role in a conventional practice. For example, the practice of measuring, where the length that is one metre or the weight that is one pound is fixed by convention with reference to some standard metre or standard pound kept hermetically in a sealed environment. Wittgenstein says that the standard metre is 'a paradigm in our language-game; something with which comparison is made' (I §50). In other places, Wittgenstein suggests that particulars work as standards by being 'typical' samples of the category. How do we explain what a game is? We point out or describe typical games, and say, 'These and similar things are games' (I §69). How do we explain to someone the shape

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953).

of a leaf? We point out various different leaves, adding, 'These and similar things are leaves.' There is no general, universal rule determining the application of the word 'game' or 'shape of leaf', no set of necessary and sufficient conditions that fix the boundaries of the concept. Instead, each member of the category stands in relations of more or less close resemblance with at least some other members of the same category, and the 'typical' members are those items that bear a family resemblance with more or most of the others.[2] Still a third view, again discoverable in Wittgenstein, is that a particular can function as if it were a 'schema' or 'prototype' for other items in the same category (I §73). A schema is to be thought of, most broadly, as a complex whole, a network of relationships between placeholders and substitution places (or slots and slot values; see below). New particulars resemble the schema to the extent that they are the product of substitution of different values into the places. For example, a recipe for cooking banana bread is schematic for the recipe for other kinds of bread and cake, with appropriate substitutions of ingredients, cooking times, and so on.

Three Models of Particulars as Standards

In at least some of what should count as thinking and acting well, I claim it is particulars and not general rules which serve as the standard. I have noted three different ways in which we might try to understand how it is that a particular can provide the norm:

- It occupies a special place in a conventional practice (e.g. the standard metre).
- It is a 'typical sample' of a category, i.e. sharing most family resemblance with other members of the category.
- It is a 'schema' for the category.

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[2] This is how workers in the psychology of conceptual structure have tended to interpret Wittgenstein. For example, E. Rosch and C. B. Mervis, 'Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories', *Cognitive Psychology* 7 (1975), pp. 573–605, at p. 575: 'A family resemblance relationship consists of a set of items [in which] each item has at least one, and probably several, elements in common with one or more other items, but no, or few, elements are common to all items. . . . Members of a category come to be viewed as prototypical of the category as a whole in proportion to the extent to which they bear a family resemblance to (have attributes which overlap those of) other members of the category. Conversely, items viewed as most prototypical of one category will be those with least family resemblance to or membership in other categories.'

Reasoning, likewise, I suggest, is not necessarily rule-governed but can also be case-based. What is not yet clear is whether any of these ways of thinking of particulars as exemplars leads to a conception of case-based reasoning that is interesting and substantive. Some things, however, must be true whatever our conception is of the role of cases in case-based reasoning. In any theory of case-based reasoning there will be:

(A) a *base-set* of one or more standard cases, and
(B) methods or procedures for the
  (i) *selection* of a standard case based on its similarity to the case in hand
  (ii) *adaptation* of the selected case to fit the new case
  (iii) *assimilation* of the new case to the category or quality instantiated
  (iv) *cross-checking* of the proposed assimilation – does it work?

Different theories of case-based reasoning will attach more or less weight to each of these elements, or perhaps none at all. Here are two examples drawn from the literature: one an account of the nature of legal reasoning, the other a proposal in epistemology.

> The basic pattern of legal reasoning is reasoning by example. It is reasoning from case to case. It is a three-step process described by the doctrine of precedent in which a proposition descriptive of the first case is made into a rule of law and then applied to a next similar situation. The steps are these: similarity is seen between cases; next the rule of law inherent in the first case is announced; then the rule of law is made applicable to the second case.[3]

As I will describe in Chapter 6, this is an uncannily apt description of the reasoning about law in the Indian *dharmaśāstra*. Again:

> Perhaps our intuitive notion of justification is tied to a number of prototypical exemplars, and that in deciding new cases we focus in some context sensitive way on one or another of these

[3] Edward H. Levi, *An Introduction to Legal Reasoning* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949), pp. 1–2. Cf. John Forrester, 'If *p*, Then What? Thinking in Cases', *History of the Human Sciences* 9 (1996), pp. 1–25.

> exemplars, making our decision about justification on the basis of how similar the case in hand is to the exemplar on which we are focussing.[4]

These two examples are illustrative of the two domains of application of case-based reasoning: *problem-solving*, in which solutions to new problems are based on solutions that are known to work in other cases; and the *application of evaluative concepts* on the basis of standing instances of evaluation.[5] In Levi's account of legal reasoning, there is a base-set of past legal precedents, a step in which similarity is seen between the new case and some or other precedent, a step in which the legal principle inherent in that precedent is adapted and made applicable to the case in hand, and, ideally, though not in Levi's theory, some process of cross-checking the verdict so reached against other known facts, legal principles and in terms of its consequences. And again, in Stich's account of our application of the concept of justification to cognitive processes, some context-sensitive procedure for selecting a prototypical exemplar of a justified cognitive process is followed by an assimilation of the new case to the category of 'justified cognitive process' if the new case is similar enough to the old.

I will make two general remarks about the idea of a *method* or *procedure* involved in reasoning from cases. First, it is of central importance that the method does not consist in the application of a context-neutral or universal rule. That is not to deny that the method is in some sense 'rule-governed', but rather that the rule to be followed is picked contextually and pragmatically to fit the case in hand. A method for selection chooses known cases as appropriate exemplars on the basis of a comparison with the case in hand. But it is not clear that, in saying you are then following a

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[4] Stephen Stich, 'Reflective Equilibrium, Analytic Epistemology and the Problem of Cognitive Diversity', *Synthese* 74 (1988), pp. 391–413, at p. 402.

[5] See Janet L. Kolodner, 'An Introduction to Case-Based Reasoning', *Artificial Intelligence Review* 6 (1992), pp. 3–34; at p. 21: 'Rather than viewing reasoning as primarily a composition process, we view it as a process of remembering one or a small set of concrete instances or cases and basing decisions on comparisons between the new situation and the old instance. . . . Cases are used in two very different ways – to provide ballpark solutions that are adapted to fit a new situation, and to provide concrete evidence for or against some solution that drives a criticism or evaluation procedure (eg in the law). CBR is thus a process of "remember a case and adapt its solution" or "remember a case and evaluate the new one based on its outcome" '.

rule, one is saying any more than that you are doing 'the same' as you did before. Wittgenstein:

> The use of the word 'rule' and the use of the word 'same' are interwoven. . . . Suppose someone gets the series of numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, . . . by working out the series $2x+1$. And now he asks himself: 'But am I always doing the same thing, or something different every time?' (I, §§225–6)

A past case is a counterpoint for a judgement of resemblance, and resemblance judgements are context-sensitive, local and malleable. That is why subjects, when asked to describe the *typical* members of a category, differ widely in their descriptions.[6] Likewise, a method of adaptation will use strategies of insertion, deletion and substitution to fit the old case to the new, and these again are sensitive to particular aspects of the situation. The critical determinant here is end or purpose: under what conditions does a modification in the original preserve the desired characteristic (e.g. of becoming a nice-tasting bread)? Again, we *can* say that the method is rule-governed, but the rule is only a local guide to the direction of modification. Wittgenstein again:

> A rule stands there like a sign-post. – Does the sign-post leave no doubt open about the way I have to go? Does it shew which direction I am to take when I have passed it; whether along the road or the footpath or cross-country? But where is it said which way I am to follow it; whether in the direction of its finger or (e.g.) in the opposite one? . . . [87] The sign-post is in order – if, under normal circumstances, it fulfils its purpose. (I, §85).

The methods of selection and adaptation in case-based reasoning are situational and *ad hoc*, and if we wish nevertheless to describe them as 'rule-governed', that only tells us something about what we mean by a

[6] L. K. Komatsu, 'Recent Views of Conceptual Structure', *Psychological Bulletin* 112 (1992), pp. 500–26, at pp. 508–9: 'By assuming that particular instances retrieved from long-term memory depend on context, goals, prior processing, frequency of occurrence or retrieval, time of last retrieval, and so on, the instance approach can explain specificity of encoding, in instability of instance retrieval and typicality judgments, and the sensitivity of typicality judgments to context, goals, points of view and frequency of instantiation.'

rule. Rules, like the ruler made out of lead, must be fashioned after the particular.

My second general remark concerns specifically the method of selection based on similarity. Everything resembles everything else in some respect or another, so it is critical to an interesting theory of case-based reasoning that it tells us how relations of resemblance are constrained. We might recall Socrates' caution in the *Sophist*: 'Yes, and a wolf is very like a dog, the wildest like the tamest of animals. But the cautious man must be especially on his guard in the matter of resemblances, for they are very slippery things' (*Sophist* 231a). In particular, there will be many instances where the new case under investigation resembles one past case in one respect and a different past case in another, the two cases pulling in opposite directions. Similarities are like signposts and different similarities can point in different directions. Indeed it is characteristic of any account of case-based reasoning that it faces and offers a solution to this problem, which I will call the 'contradiction problem' for local norms.

Let us now consider how each of our three conceptions of what it is for a particular to serve as a standard shape corresponding conceptions of what reasoning from cases involves. When particulars occupy privileged positions in conventional practices, like the standard metre in Paris in the practice of measuring, the methods of selection and adaptation are largely trivial – there is only one standard to select, and similarity to it is simply a matter of equivalence in length or weight. Any new object is judged to be one metre just in case it resembles the standard metre in being of the same length, but there is no question of an adaptation of the standard length to fit the new case. The lack of any context dependence in the methods makes this an at best degenerate form of case-based reasoning, the standard particular differing from an ideal norm or Platonic Form only in being particular. It does not sustain an account of reasoning interestingly different from the conception of reasoning as governed by inflexible law.[7]

Matters stand differently with the other two accounts, in which particulars enter as typical samples and as schemata respectively. In order

[7] R. S. Bluck reports Wittgenstein as inclined to a similar view of the matter: 'Plato called his forms *paradigmata*, and he is taken to mean that they were patterns or standards of which objects and acts in the sensible world are copies. But in what sense are they "standards"? . . . Wittgenstein once suggested to me that a Form may be to its homonymous instances as the Standard Pound is to a pound weight in a shop.' R. S. Bluck, 'Forms as Standards', *Phronesis* 2 (1956/1957), pp. 115–27.

to illustrate and develop these accounts, I will return now to India. In a period when a certain style of writing and thinking – the so-called *sūtra* style – dominated the intellectual milieu in virtually every area of reflective endeavour (that is, a period spanning approximately 100 BCE to 200 CE), and specifically in the voluminous analytical writings on public debate, grammar, logic and ritual, there arose distinctive understandings of what it is to measure something against a standard, models of good and bad reasoning that are not rule-governed but case-based. In fact, in the *Nyāya-sūtra* theory of public reasoning we have a carefully worked out account of case-based reasoning in which particulars enter as typical samples, and in the Ritual Sūtras schematic individuals are seen as having an essential role in practical reasoning about the performance of ritual acts.

Particulars as Paradigms in the *Nyāya-sūtra*

Case-based reasoning begins with one or more paradigmatic exemplars of a category, and reasons that some new object belongs to the same category on the grounds that it resembles in some appropriate and context-determined manner one of the exemplars. Models of case-based reasoning have been put forward for medical diagnostics and legal reasoning, and some have been implemented in artificial intelligence models. It has been shown, for example, that training a robot to solve problems by having it retrieve solutions to stored past cases, modifying them to fit the new circumstances, can have great efficiency gains over seeking solutions through the application of first principles. Perhaps something like this underlies a lot of the way people actually reason, and perhaps it was as an attempt to capture this type of reasoning that we should see the ancient logic of the *Nyāya-sūtra* and indeed of the medical theorist Caraka. In this model, a perceived association between symptoms in one case provides a reason for supposing there to be an analogous association in other, resembling cases. To repeat an example I gave before, a physician observing a patient who has eaten a certain kind of poisonous mushroom sees a range of associated symptoms displayed. Presented with a second patient displaying a resembling symptom, the physician thinks back over her past case histories and seeks to establish if any of those past cases resembles the new patient. A common ætiology produces a common underlying disorder, one that manifests itself in and explains associations between members of a symptom-cluster.

Can we find such a model of the informal logic of case-based reasoning in the *Nyāya-sūtra*? In Chapter 2 I began to argue that we can, that

the *Nyāya-sūtra* account is a general theory of case-based reasoning. The method of selection is: choose an example that is typical of the group with respect to the property one is seeking to prove, and whose properties generally are commonly agreed upon. The fact that there is public agreement about the example is vital to its role as anchor in public reasoning. Thus:

> NS 1.1.25: That matter about which the ordinary person and the expert think the same is an 'example'.

Compare with what we find in an ancient medical treatise, the *Caraka-Saṃhitā*:

> What is called 'example' is that in which both the ignorant and the wise think the same and that which explicates what is to be explicated. As for instance, 'fire is hot,' 'water is wet,' 'earth is hard,' 'the sun illuminates'.[8]

Typicality is itself a matter of resemblance: a grain of rice is typical with respect to the matter of being cooked if it more closely resembles more of the other grains in that matter than does any other grain (it is not, for instance, peculiarly resistant or susceptible to being cooked). It will be typical of members in the group either to have the property (e.g. being cooked) (1.1.36), or else not to have it (being uncooked) and so be to the contrary of what is being proved (1.1.37). Then comes the method of assimilation: if the new case resembles the typical example (1.1.38), in, for example, being in the same pan for the same length of time (1.1.34), then it too will have the property in question; otherwise not (1.1.38). This method is sensitive to context, for it is only a specific context that determines of *which group* the example is to be a typical member (here, rice grains in the pan). So our evaluation of the argument as good or bad derives, not from the application of some fixed set of deductive principles, but from a detailed examination of the specifics of the case under investigation. We are simply not in a position to evaluate the argument until we are given a full description of the circumstances in which it is being pressed.

An immediate objection to the Nyāya method is that the new case might resemble the typical exemplar in all sorts of ways irrelevant to the question at hand. For example, both the grain of rice under investigation and the

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[8] *Caraka-Saṃhitā* 3.8.34: atha dṛṣṭāntaḥ – dṛṣṭānto nāma yatra mūrkhaviduṣāṃ buddhisāmyā, yo varṇyam varṇayati | yathā – agnir uṣṇaḥ, dravam udakā, sthirā pṛthivī, ādityā prakāśaka iti; yathā ādityaḥ prakāśakas tathā sāṃkhyajñānā prakāśakam iti ||

typical grain whose properties are well known might be the same colour, grown in the same field and so on. It appears to be admissible to transfer the property 'rainmaker' from one black cloud to another black cloud, but not from a black cloud to a white cloud. It appears to be admissible to transfer the property 'has a dewlap' from one cow to another cow, but not from one four-legged animal (a cow) to another (a horse). An objection in this form is called a *jāti*, a 'rejoinder based on similarity'. The discussion of such rejoinders occupies a prominent position in the *Nyāya-sūtra* (NS 1.2.18 and the whole of 5.1), and in other early works in Indian logic, and it is here that what I am calling the 'Contradiction Problem' for local norms is addressed. A *jāti* is an argument based on a 'false' resemblance, a resemblance that pulls in a direction opposite to that of a 'true' proof. The problem is to find a way to distinguish between the resemblance that grounds a good argument, and the resemblance that grounds only a phoney proof. The *Nyāya-sūtra* solution to the contradiction problem is to call attention to the particularities of the case that is working as a standard:

> NS 5.1.34 Because a reason is a property recognised in the example as being in the nature of a proof relation, and because it has the nature of both [similarity and dissimilarity], [there is] no lack of distinction [between good and bad arguments].

We can understand this solution only if we recall that arguments are always pressed within the context of a dialogue between disputants, and indeed that the whole discussion of case-based reasoning in the *Nyāya-sūtra* is embedded in a wider discussion of the nature and method of dialogue.

Arguments must be evaluated in terms of the effectiveness with which they achieve the purpose for which they are put forward in a specific dialogical context (see Chapters 2 and 3). In a typical dialogue, there is a pressing of a thesis along with an argument (*sthāpanā*), and a pressing of the counter-thesis along with a counter-argument (*pratisthāpanā*).[9] Most important here is that a dialogue presumes that there is a body of shared background information or settled opinions (*siddhānta;* see Introduction). We are due some account of what kinds of similarity between the typical example and the new case are relevant to the property whose presence in the new case is in question. That account, clearly, is going to be in terms of a body of theoretical information: an explanation of the cooking process that tells us why distance from the heat source or quantity of water matter

[9] Cf. *Caraka-saṃhitā* 3.8.31.

to cooking, but not the colour or origin of the rice; an explanation of rain-making that rules black and not white clouds as relevant to the inference that it will rain. Such shared background information informs the entire process, telling us in particular how to go about selecting a sample whose properties are going to be representative of the whole (e.g., from the middle of the pot, not the top). And so, in saying that the example must be well known as such to all, the method is insisting that *all parties in the dialogue* know what it is for some instance to count as a typical example in the case in hand. Otherwise, if someone were to take an uncooked grain of rice from the same sack as the rice in the pan had been drawn from, and say that this is his sample, we should have no means to reply to him as we would wish to, that coming from the same sack is irrelevant in the matter of whether the other rice is cooked or not. Shared background information, presupposed in the dialectical context in which the argument is embedded, is what determines relevance when particulars function as standards by being typical samples.

In summary, the *Nyāya-sūtra* theory is this:

> An argument A, of the form <*Fa* because *Ga*>, embedded in a dialogical context c, is good/sound if and only if *a* resembles a paradigmatic example *e* typical of *F* in a manner *G* made relevant in c to *F*.

This formulation serves to remind us of the two features I emphasised before: the essential role of background knowledge, and the ineliminability of the example in favour of a general rule. Generalisations have two distinct roles: one is to function as *enabling* conditions in resemblance-based reasoning; the other is to provide *guiding* rules in explicit derivations. Criticisms of the case-based model almost invariably depend on a confusion of these two distinct functions (a conflation which, as we saw in Chapter 2, led to a transformation within Indian logic itself).

Particulars as Prototypes in the Ritual Sūtras

Particulars can function as standards in still another way: by being schematic of a category. The idea of a schema, as it has entered the psychological cognitive science literature, is summarised by Komatsu:

> The information that constitutes a schema is described (and organised) in terms of variables called *roles* or *slots*. . . .The schema specifies the

> values that can and cannot fill each slot . . . and may specify the probability distribution of values that the slot may be filled with. . . . . If no value for a slot is specified for a particular instance of a concept . . . a value for that slot, called the default value, is inferred. Several aspects of default values should be noted. First, default values can be overridden if the context on a particular occasion of use suggests a different value. . . . . Second, assignment of default values can be context free or contingent on the values assigned to other slots. . . . [I]n addition to retaining information about slots and slot values, schemata are assumed to maintain information about the relationships among slots and slot values.[10]

A schema then is (i) a framework of relationships between slots and (ii) a specification of the default values for each of the slots, and constraints on the range of substitution values.[11] A particular recipe, for example, is a framework of instructions about ingredients, times and measures. Modification of the recipe to fit a new case is a matter of substitution of some ingredients in the original recipe (the default values) for ingredients (values) adapted to the new recipe. A particular case provides a framework, a functioning whole and an indication of the constraints on modification under which well-functioning is preserved (one might replace apples with pears in the recipe, but not flour with salt, and still have a good cake recipe). Similarity is now a matter of sharing a common framework, with different slot values in different resembling cases. The method of *selecting* suitable schematic prototypes is a matter first of seeking prototypes sharing a common framework, then selecting on the basis of function or purpose: the schematic prototype most closely akin in purpose to the new case is the one to be selected. The method of *adaption* consists in making substitutions of slot values, replacing the default values of the prototype with values specific to the new case. And the method of *assimilation* is one of verifying that the substitute values fall within the range specified by the prototype as

[10] Komatsu, 'Recent Views of Conceptual Structure', p. 510.

[11] Cf. D. E. Rumelhart, 'Schemata: The Building Blocks of Cognition', in R. J. Spiro, B. C. Bruce, and W. F. Brewer (eds), *Theoretical Issues in Reading Comprehension* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1980), pp. 33–58; B. Cohen & G. L. Murphy, 'Models of Concepts', *Cognitive Science* 8 (1984), pp. 27–58.

function-preserving, for then, the new case will work well if the prototypical instance did.[12]

Such a model is developed in the Ritual Sūtras, a corpus of Vedic literature on the performance of ritual practices. Some rituals are described in full detail; others only incompletely. The question then arises: how to fill in the missing details in such a way that the ritual is performed correctly. In the method of the Ritual Sūtras, some rituals – the fully described ones – are prototypes (*prakṛti*), and others are described only by way of specific instructions (*ādeśa*) pointing out differences from the prototype. A prototypical ritual has a two-part structure, a basic ritual framework (*tantra*; literally, 'warp') of subsidiary rites, into which there is the insertion (*āvāpa*; literally, 'woof') of the rites that form the principal part of the ritual. Specific instructions are rules for the substitution of one insertion in place of another, and this is the process by which the prototype is transformed into any of its variations (*vikṛti*). Here are some typical meta-statements in the Ritual Sūtras:[13]

> The new and full moon sacrifices which have been explained are the prototype for the *iṣṭi* and animal sacrifices. 'Prototype' is the name of that which is transferable (ŚŚS 1.16.1–2).
>
> But we shall explain the new and full moon sacrifices first since the basic framework (*tantra*) has been handed down in that context (ĀŚS 1.1.3).
>
> The new moon sacrifice is the basic framework; in this respect the general rule is this: in all *iṣṭi*s and animal sacrifices, the properties follow those prescribed for the new and full moon sacrifices (BhŚS 6.15.4–5).
>
> The sacrifice which is performed between the butter-portions and the offering to Agni Sviṣṭikṛt is called the 'insertion'. This is the principal

[12] The use of cases as prototypical schemata seems also to be close in spirit to the 'mental models' approach to the representation of reasoning developed by Johnson-Laird. See P. N. Johnson-Laird, *Mental Models: Towards a Cognitive Science of Language, Inference and Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); and for an application to Indian theory, Amita Chatterjee and Smita Sirker, 'Diṅnāga and Mental Models: A Reconstruction', *Philosophy East and West* 60, 3 (2010), pp. 315–40.

[13] In what follows, ĀśvŚS=Āśvalāyana Śrauta Sūtra; BhŚS=Bhāradvāja Śrauta Sūtra; HŚS=Hiraṇyakeśin Śrauta Sūtra; KŚS=Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra; ŚŚS=Śānkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra.

[part of the ritual]. The other parts are auxiliary to it. They constitute the *tantra* (ŚŚS 1.16.3–5).

What are the methods of selection and adaptation in case-based reasoning about the proper way to perform new rituals? Resemblance to the variation guides the selection of a prototype,[14] a resemblance that is standardly said to consist in similarity with respect to three aspects of the ritual framework: the number of potsherds on which the sacrificial cakes are baked; similarity of divinity for whom the sacrifice is dedicated; and similarity in oblation material.[15]

When a prototype has been selected, its entire ritual framework is made applicable to the variation in a process known as 'extended application' or 'transfer' (*atideśa*).[16] The transfer from prototype to variation is subject to constraints of two kinds, and it is these constraints that constitute the method of adaptation in the Ritual Sūtras. First, specific instructions pertaining to the performance of a particular ritual always take precedence over the general meta-rule that properties of the prototype are to be transferred to the variation. In the Ritual Sūtras, the particular always has priority over the general.[17] And, second, transfer from prototype to

[14] Thus Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 127: 'The general rule for tracing an unknown paradigm from a known variation invokes a principle that operates in many other situations in the Vedic mental universe. "In case of doubt, the rule is to be inferred from resemblance" (ŚŚS 1.16.18); other texts lay down a similar proposition, stating that "The modification (*vikāra*) is known from the resemblance" (BhŚS 6.15.9). The resembling features of different sacrifices make possible both the inferences between them and the discovery of the appropriate paradigm from which to infer.'

[15] Smith, *Reflections*, pp. 133–4. Cf. ŚŚS 1.16.18: '[In case of doubt], the rule is to be inferred from resemblance'; BhŚS 6.15.9: 'The modification (*vikāra*) is known from the resemblance.'

[16] See Samiran Chandra Chakrabarti, *The Paribhāṣās in the Śrautasūtras* (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1980), p. 124: 'The sacrifices some of the particulars of which are not specified borrow them from similar sacrifices that are enjoined with all the details. This process of extended application of details by analogy is called *atideśa*, by which the subsidiaries prescribed in connexion with one sacrifice are made applicable beyond that sacrifice and transferred to similar sacrifices. The sacrifice from which the subordinate rites are transferred is called an archetype (*prakṛti*) and the sacrifice to which they are so transferred is called an ectype (*vikṛti*).'

[17] In the Hindu theory of *āpad-dharma*, normal social and moral duties are suspended in 'times of distress'. We find this for example in *Mahābhārata* 12.131–73, which elaborates a version of moral particularism in deliberation about *dharma*.

variant can be overridden by wider considerations of purpose. If a certain material or rite ceases to have any function in the new ritual, then it ought to be dropped,[18] for the material is always less important than the purpose for which it is prescribed. And resemblance of purpose or end (*arthasāmānya*) between a variant and a prototype takes precedence over any other resemblance.[19] This, indeed, is the Ritual Sūtra solution to the problem of contradiction. When two prototypes both resemble, albeit in different respects, the ritual in question, commonality of purpose is the ground upon which a choice is to be made:

> When there is a contradiction [of resemblance] between the oblation material and the purpose, it is the resemblance of purpose [that is more important] because it [the oblation] is for the sake of the other [the purpose] (KŚS 1.4.16).

Reasoning in the Ritual Sūtras is practical reasoning: the question is always, how ought this ritual be performed? The basic principle for reasoning about rituals is that properties of well-understood rituals are to be transferred to structurally similar but less well understood rituals, and the basic constraint is one of minimal modification – not to make any substitution that is unnecessary and, if a substitution is necessary, to choose a substitute most nearly resembling the original. Particular rituals work as standards in that they are ready-made wholes, the parts of which are connected in such a way that the whole performs well. The ritual prototype tells us both how the parts work together to achieve the goal (how parts are related in the framework) and also the conditions under which specific parts can be substituted without the function being lost (which parts are just place-holders or insertions). So the account of what it is for a particular to be a standard in the Ritual Sūtras is something like this:

> A ritual R, of the form <framework F, specific insertions S>, is well performed iff R resembles a prototype *e* in having a shared framework

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[18] Smith, *Reflections*, p. 132. Cf. ĀśvŚS 2.1.22–23.

[19] Smith, *Reflections*, pp. 136, 181–2. KŚS 4.3.2: 'The properties of the new and full moon sacrifices are carried to the *iṣṭi* and animal sacrifices because there is a commonality of purpose'. KŚS 4.3.20: 'Rules [in the prototype] are to be modified according to the purpose [of the variant]'. ĀśvŚS 2.14.14: 'The modification in the ritual framework of sacrifices not mentioned here [in a section on the paradigmatic sacrifices] should proceed out of consideration for the particular purpose [of those sacrifices]'.

> F and a similar purpose, and is a variation of *e* resulting from the substitution of S in accordance with specific instructions in R, and from such modifications of F that preserve or maintain the purpose.

As I will argue in the next two chapters of this book, this model of deliberative reason in the sphere of ritual action comes to be converted into an account of practical reason in general moral thinking.

What does this tell us about the nature of reasoning when the particulars work as prototypical schemata? First, that methods of selection and adaptation are implied by the description of the particular, with its bivalent structure of framework and insertion. As a structured complex whole, the schematic particular is normative: it constrains what other particulars count as resembling it by sharing a common basic framework, and it constrains what modifications or substitutions are possible, thereby determining a method of adaptation. Like a column with curved flutes, a schematic particular bends the standard of comparison to fit itself. Second, the standards are again context-sensitive and localised, this time because of the overriding requirement that proper purpose is preserved, whether that be matching the shapes of columns or baking cakes that are still good to eat, or performing rituals that have their intended effects. That implies that substitutions and comparisons remain close to the prototype; that the spread of the standards of selection and adaptation is localised. And so, in both of the models of case-based reasoning we have considered—the model in which particulars are typical samples and the model in which they are prototypical schemata—the standard is not absolute and universal, but localised, sensitive to context and open-ended. To sum up, the *Nyāya-sūtra* and the Ritual Sūtras present to us two important and interesting styles of 'thinking well', styles that are not very well understood if we think of all good reasoning as involving a subsumption to the general.

The theory just developed can help us to understand how there can be cultural variation in normative reasoning and evaluating practice, but no incommensurability. From variation in reasoning practice it does not follow that the concept of reason itself is contextually or culturally variable; it implies only that there is a variation in the base-sets of exemplars and in the kinds of background information that inform similarity judgements. If the same is true of other normative concepts, ethical and epistemological, then that is an argument in favour of the view that case-based reasoning is the right sort of reasoning in matters of ethical and epistemic deliberation. It might also provide for the kind of

immersed and internal method of rational criticism that Amartya Sen[20] and Bimal Matilal[21] regard as essential in the evaluation and criticism of a tradition's values: *internal*, in 'using resources inside the culture itself in order to criticise certain aspects of the culture', and *immersed* in that 'its norm of objectivity should not be one that involves detachment of the judging subject from the practices, the perceptions, even the emotions, of the culture'; that is a method for the evaluation of a culture's values that is both genuinely critical and yet does not imperiously transpose external values from without. The question of the extent to which a civilisation has the capacity to turn its reasoning practices upon itself, and in the process become genuinely self-critical and revisionary, is a theme I will continue to explore in the next chapter, and return to again in Part III.

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[20] Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, 'Internal Criticism and Indian Rationalist Traditions', in Michael Krasz (ed.), *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 299–325.

[21] 'Pluralism, Relativism and Interaction Between Cultures', in Eliot Deutsch (ed.), *Culture and Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), pp. 141–60. See also Chapter 15.

5

The Critic Within

Multiple Hinduisms

It is by now a commonplace to observe that 'Hinduism' is a term of comparatively recent provenance, an outsiders' designation of forms of religiosity happening to belong to a particular geographical region. It rightly has been said that it serves at best as 'an acceptable abbreviation for a family of culturally similar traditions',[1] that it is a sort of catch-all for what is 'in truth a group of religions which have much in common between them, but in which there are also many differences and contrasts'.[2] Minimally, the term has been used to designate those non-Buddhist, non-Jaina, non-Muslim and non-Sikh forms of religious life in the Indian subcontinent which have in some (often rather loose) sense drawn inspiration from designated groups of texts: the Vedas (prescriptions of a variety of types of ritual practice), and associated work on ritual theory; the books about social duty and political obligation of Manu, and other works that pertain to the concept of dharma ('duty'); the two epic stories, the *Mahābhārata*, of which the *Bhagavad-gītā* – Kṛṣṇa's advice to Arjuna on the eve of battle – is a part, and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the story of Rāma; the Upaniṣads ('hidden teachings' about the self) and the commentaries on them. Other texts, however, are of equal or greater centrality for one or another specific subgroup. Attempts to provide a more substantive characterisation of Hinduism have always

[1] Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 6.

[2] Paul Hacker, 'Dharma in Hinduism', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34 (2006), pp. 479–96, p. 479. Originally 'Dharma im Hinduismus', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 49 (1965), pp. 93–106.

been associated with ambitions to impose one or another political conception of India, or to superimpose on it a philosophical ideology. My aim in this chapter to is examine key ideas which philosophers within one or another Hindu culture have taken to be implicated in any involvement of reason. I also hope this approach can show that the discipline of 'philosophy of religion' must work towards a self-understanding that does not impose European paradigms on non-European approaches both to religion and to its philosophy. The fact that almost no 'Hindu' doctrine goes unquestioned and unchallenged by another 'Hindu' shows that the emphasis must be on the dynamics of philosophical dialogue within the culture, rather than the defence of a doctrinal canon. There are Hindus who deny the existence of God, and there are Hindus who deny that there is life after death; the real focus of interest therefore is on the nature of internal ways of challenging, affirming, re-evaluating, and re-describing what are identified as the fundamental philosophical issues.

The Vedas are taken by the philosophers of classical India to consist essentially in an eternal, authorless body of ritual imperatives of the general schematic form 'One who desires heaven ought to perform the *agnihotra* sacrifice.' The prescription of ritual performance is, however, but one part of this complex corpus of texts, the earliest of which, the Ṛg-Veda, dates back to many centuries BCE (dating the texts with any degree of accuracy is, unfortunately, extremely problematic).[3] A school studying the philosophical basis of Vedic ritual theory came into being; its foundational text is the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra*, the term 'mīmāṃsā' implying 'examination with reasons'. The best known of the Mīmāṃsā intellectuals are Śabara (*c.* 400 CE)

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[3] The following presents a good summary of the general nature of the Vedic text: 'Vedic ritual and liturgy in their fully developed form culminated in sacrifice "on the practice and knowledge whereof man's welfare is based" (VārŚS 1.1.1). Homage to the divine powers consisted essentially of oblations thrown into the sacred fire, which as a divine person (Agni) was supposed to convey these to the gods (*deva*) or to invite the latter to dinner at the sacrificial place. The purpose of this ritual was the gratification of the gods in order to obtain from them benefits such as offspring, increase of cattle, a long lifetime, wealth, superiority, success in war. There are "invariable" (*nitya*), obligatory rites, some of them to be performed daily, others on precise dates of the lunar calendar; occasional (*naimittika*) ceremonies to be carried out on the occurrence of certain events; and optional (*kāmya*) rites performed by those who are desirous of special favours, personal advantages etc., and consisting of the ordinary procedures with the addition of special formulas.' Jan Gonda, *The Ritual Sūtras* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977), p. 467.

and Kumārila (*c.* 650 CE). Mīmāṃsā represents, we might note, a strand of atheism within Hinduism; other Hindus believe that there is a single cosmic principle, called *brahman*; and in popular expressions of religion there are of course many gods which provide the immediate objects of devotion. (The fact that there are atheist as well as monotheist and polytheist Hindus ought to be enough of a warning about selecting some one strand of thought within Hinduism and claiming that it is 'central'.) I will return to the idea of an 'examination with reasons' in the next chapter, and demonstrate that there are deep affinities with the particularist case-based model of reasoning I described above.

If you do use the term 'Hinduism', you must, as I have stressed, surrender the expectation of being able to describe anything as the 'essence' of Hinduism, or think that it is likely that you will be able to uncover substantive generalisations that are both true and interesting. Wittgenstein himself (to whom the idea of such family-resemblance designation is due), in lecture notes from 1930–1933, gave voice to a more fundamental difficulty which needs to be addressed in the comparative philosophical study of rationality within religion – that although each of the members of the family may use a common vocabulary of religious terms, their usages might be, in his phrase, 'grammatically incomparable'. Thus (and with an apparent allusion to Hinduism):

> About 'God' his [Wittgenstein's] main point seemed to be that this word is used in many grammatically different senses. He said, for instance, that many controversies about God could be settled by saying 'I'm not using the word in such a sense that you can say . . .', and that different religions 'treat things as making sense which others treat as nonsense, and don't merely deny some proposition which another religion affirms'; and he illustrated this by saying that if people use 'God' to mean something like a human being, then 'God has four arms' and 'God has two arms' will both have sense, but that others so use 'God' that 'God has arms' is nonsense – would say 'God can't have arms'.. . . To explain what he meant by 'grammatically' different senses, he said we wanted terms which are not 'comparable' . . . but which differ as, e.g. 'chair' differs from 'permission to sit on a chair', or 'railway' from 'railway accident'.[4]

[4] G. E. Moore, 'Wittgenstein's lectures in 1930–33, III', *Mind* 253 (1955), pp. 1–27, at pp. 16–17.

It makes little sense to ask when the *railway* occurred, although it does make sense to ask when the *railway accident* took place, because these two terms have, in Wittgenstein's special sense of the expression, different 'grammars', delimitations of what is properly sayable. It is perhaps the case that the controversies between Buddhism and Hinduism over *karman* (moral 'action') and *ātman* ('self') are incomparable in just this manner, the apparently metaphysical claim that *ātman can't* be a substance being translatable, following Wittgenstein's proposal, into the higher-order claim that '*ātman* is a substance' does not *say* anything, given the Buddhist use of the term (I will return to the actual mechanics of the Hindu–Buddhist debate about the self in Chapters 12 and 13). The lesson I shall draw, for the purposes of this chapter, is that one should not take the conceptual apparatus and vocabulary of the discipline of philosophy of religion as somehow antecedently given, and so already available to shape our discussion of Hinduism's contribution. Rather, one should ask, of some given Hindu thinker or group of thinkers, how one is to understand the philosophical questions made salient to them by their religious dispositions and outlooks. The familiar, given, categories in the philosophy of religion can seem to provide a Procrustean bed for discussion, but in fact need to adapt themselves to the particular, so that a theoretical framework emerges in response to the specificities of the case in hand. What I am saying is that a careful analysis of the concept 'Hinduism' itself, and by implication any other similar designation, re-affirms the point and utility of a rejection of a universal rule-based approach, for which I have already begun to argue.

A Dissenting Voice

For at least some Hindus, the fundamental philosophical question is the following: given that the statements of the Vedic corpus – whether they be heard or read – deserve credence, what is the rational foundation of that assent-worthiness? In virtue of what does the Veda belong within the space of reasons? This is the problem examined in the discussion under *Nyāya-sūtra* 2.1.57–68. A sceptical opponent is made to voice the problem:

> The Vedas cannot command assent, because they suffer from the following epistemological defects: falsity, inconsistency and repetition.[5]

[5] NS 2.1.57: tad-aprāmāṇyam anṛta-vyāghāta-punarukta-doṣebhyaḥ.

It is, one should note, far from atypical of a Hindu text for dialectical space to be given for sceptical, dissenting voices, for the critical stance to be taken seriously, and for detailed argument and counter-argument to ensue. The most famous, though by no means most philosophical, example is Ṛgveda 10.129: 'Whence this creation has arisen – perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not – the One who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only He knows – or perhaps He does not know.' *Nyāya-sūtra* 2.1.57 articulates a fundamental sceptical worry about the entire legitimacy and epistemic value of the Vedas themselves, perhaps the voice of some actual doubter, perhaps only a hypothetical one (that is to say, a *pūrvapakṣa*). It is, as we will see, through reason alone that such voices are sought to be answered.

What, first of all, does the term **falsity** signify in the sceptical challenge? Remembering that the canonical form of a Vedic statement is the hypothetical imperative – 'One who desires result X should perform action Y' – 'falsity' here consists in the observed performance of the prescribed action Y with the observed non-occurrence of the declared result X. The Vedas lend themselves to empirical disconfirmation because they frequently make claims about the observable results of ordinary actions, for example, prescribing a certain rite for someone who wants a child. Might one attempt to avoid the risk of empirical disconfirmation by restricting Vedic assent-worthiness to those hypotheticals that prescribe trans-empirical results? Vātsyāyana, one of the commentators on the *Nyāya-sūtra*, foresees this move, and answers on behalf of the sceptic that the observable 'falsity' of the Vedas in *some* cases discredits them in *all* (NBh 90, 13–16).[6] Trust is undermined by infectious evidence of unreliability. For that reason, the claim of the *Maitrāyana Upaniṣad*, 'One who desires heaven should perform the *agnihotra* ritual' (*Mai Up.* 6.36), is also, in an extended sense of the term, false, not because the alleged result observably fails to occur, but because the claim belongs within a class upon all of whose members suspicion has fallen.

The defect named **inconsistency** covers a pair of cases. First, there is the case where one text seems to *command* a certain act, but another text seems to *condemn* the performance of that same act. Thus, 'After sunrise, perform the sacrifice', but also 'The sacrifice performed after sunrise goes to the dogs'. Second, there are cases where a single act is commanded in both

[6] NBh=Vātsyāyana, *Nyāya-bhāṣya*. *Gautamīyanyāyadarśana with Bhāṣya of Vātsyāyana*, critical ed. Anantalal Thakur (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1997).

texts, but the attendant specifications of circumstances are incompatible. Thus, 'After sunrise, perform the sacrifice' and 'Before sunrise, perform the sacrifice'. Uddyotakara, another commentator, points out that the mutual incompatibility might be thought of in terms of the injunctions conjunctively implying that there is *no time* at which the sacrifice is enjoined to be performed (NV 251, 16–19).[7] Finally, the defect of **repetition** is exemplified by cases in which the same thing is said over and again, redundantly, which our critic likens to the speech of a drunkard (*pramatta-vākya*; NBh 91, 8)!

These three defects are really three different ways in which the religious canon fails to be compatible with reason: by being empirically falsified, and so incompatible with observable fact; by being internally inconsistent, and so incompatible with logic; and by being rambling and repetitious, incompatible with pragmatic constraints on coherence. Turning the argument around, we can say that they constitute an at least necessary condition for rational assent-worthiness in discourse: a body of discourse commands our rational assent only if the discourse is consistent with the known facts, internally coherent, and compatible with pragmatic constraints on intelligibility. Any discourse should 'make sense' along these three dimensions if it is to deserve our credence.

Meeting Reason with Reason

I have described how the sceptical challenge is formulated. Nyāya philosophers seek a reasoned response, one which speaks to the three sorts of epistemic defect that allegedly undermine the traditional authority of the Vedas. It is, first of all, not the case that some Vedic declarations are falsified by observation, for in any case in which the prescribed result does not occur, this can be accounted for by 'imperfections' in the performance of the prescribed act. Specifically, the imperfection might lie with the actual *conduct* of the act, with the *methods* and materials used, or with the mental state of the *performer*.[8] The everyday application of practical reason again provides the model. Vātsyāyana gives as an illustration the following humdrum means–end rule: 'Someone who desires fire should rub together pieces of wood.' Someone's inability so to produce fire does nothing to falsify this maxim, but merely demonstrates that something

[7] NV=Uddyotakara, *Nyāya-vārttika. Nyāyabhāṣyavārttika of Uddyotakara*, critical ed. Anantalal Thakur (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1997).

[8] NS 2.1.58: karma-kartṛ-sādhana-vaiguṇyāt.

has gone wrong in its execution. The Nyāya discussion here is highly reminiscent of Austin's account of 'performative misfires', a theory that has indeed been applied to ritual practice.[9] One might worry that the strategy of appealing to performative misfires will also save the most obviously fallacious of practical maxims, and render even magical rites immune to observational disconfirmation. To this, the correct response is, I think, that the purpose of invoking this strategy is only to show that the objection that Vedic scripture is untrustworthy because it is empirically false rests on an unestablished premise; its purpose is not to demonstrate the actual assent-worthiness of any given maxim, mundane or scriptural.

Apparent inconsistencies can always be eliminated by further relativising the statements. In our example, the Nyāya philosopher suggests that the performance of a sacrifice after sunrise is decried only for someone who has *already* resolved to perform it before sunrise; and so on (NS 2.1.59). Another technique is to argue that there is no genuine incompatibility, that is to say, no example where the very same act is both prescribed and prohibited, under exactly the same conditions and circumstances. Again, repetition is only a fault if it serves no purpose, and an important distinction is drawn between the uselessly repetitive (*abhyāsa*) and the pragmatically useful repetition (*anuvāda*; NS 2.1.60). In other words, there are pragmatic conversational functions which can be achieved through speech acts of repetition; it is not always the equivalent of drunken rambling. For example, there is a clear utility in repeatedly urging someone to go faster (NS 2.1.67).

Evidence, Expertise and Assent

Scepticism about the Vedas' epistemological credentials is grounded in the application to them of a discursive analysis appropriate to ordinary speech and communication. In its place, the *Nyāya-sūtra*, borrowing from Mīmāṃsā hermeneutical theory (about which I will soon say more), provides a systematisation of Vedic discourse in terms of three functional categories: imperative (*vidhi*); explanatory scholium (*arthavāda*); and pragmatically valuable repetition (*anuvāda*) (NS 2.1.62).[10] Couching the Vedas in an analytical framework

[9] J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1975); Stanley J. Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 45 (1979), pp. 113–69; See also Chapter 6.

[10] See also Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India* (California: University of California Press, 1963).

that preserves their discursive autonomy does nothing, however, to attest their assent-worthiness. As Vātsyāyana clearly states, 'Undermining the critical refutation is not itself sufficient to demonstrate the assent-worthiness of religious language'.[11] Further argumentation is needed.

What might seem to be the most obvious argument, namely that the statements in the religious canon are assent-worthy because they are in origin the revealed word of a non-deceptive divinity, is striking by its absence in the texts I am considering. Indeed, the dialectic at this point moves between two Hindu schools, one of which, Nyāya, locates all assent-worthiness in the epistemic credentials of the speaker, while the other, Mīmāṃsā, attempts to derive Vedic assent-worthiness from the alleged 'eternality' of the Vedic texts.[12] Mīmāṃsā philosophers claim that the allegedly impeccable epistemic credentials of Vedic pronouncements could not be secured if they had an origin, for nothing which has the nature of a composed work is intrinsically immune to error. Nyāya philosophers, on the other hand, claim that that religious epistemology of testimony is continuous with other branches of testimonially transmitted knowledge, and that the epistemic

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[11] NBh 96, 11: kiṃ punaḥ pratiṣedhahetūddhārād eva śabdasya pramāṇatvaṃ siddhyati? na.

[12] In the Mīmāṃsā, the Vedas are conceived of not merely as one body of moral precepts among others, but rather as a set of statements distinguished on formal grounds as capable of testing maxims for action. The Vedas are described in the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* (MS 1.1.2) as the 'indicator' (*lakṣaṇa*) of *dharma*, and in the *Manu-smṛti* (Manu 2.6) as the 'root' (*mūla*) of *dharma*; but in both cases, the meaning is that they are regulative and not constitutive: they guide the selection of maxims for action but do not themselves create or produce such maxims. Two of the formal criteria are that the Vedas are 'without an author' (*anapekṣa*, *apauruṣeya*) and 'eternal' (*autpattika, nitya*) (MS 1.1.5; 1.1.25–31). These are criteria that apply both to the Vedas as literary objects and as importantly to their contents. The texts themselves are without a history, and their injunctions are law-like, where the lawlikeness of a statement consists in its applying equally and non-arbitrarily, and, in consequence, no particular being mentioned by the law; its content is fully general (MS 1.1.31; 2.4.18). A third criterion is that the statement has the form of an injunction or action-prescription (*vidhi*), and a fourth that the action so prescribed has no *visible* motive for its performance (MS 1.3.4, 7; Manu 2.13). Actions prescribed by the Vedas are actions that should be done because they are right to do, as distinct from actions which rest on prudential maxims of self-interest. And also ordinary acts with detectable effects, such as tilling the land, can be tested by the empirical method of positive and negative concomitance (*anvaya-vyatireka*). It is only those moral actions without detectable effects which require some other method of testing, and it is for these that Vedic certification is necessary.

credentials of Vedic discourse must be accounted for by appeal to the same rational principles that apply in other areas. We might indeed suspect that in this dialectic the term 'assent-worthiness' (*prāmāṇya*) is being used with different grammars. A Naiyāyika might want to say that it makes no sense to say that Vedic assertions are eternal, in the way they do want to say that atoms are eternal or space is eternal. Certainly, they do not regard it as obligatory to demonstrate that the Vedas are intrinsically immune to error. Rather, the Vedas fall within the space of reasons precisely because or insofar as one can intelligibly regard their claim to our assent as an instance of the general phenomenon of assent-worthiness in speech.

So *Nyāya-sūtra* 2.1.68: 'Just as with the [contrasting?] assent-worthiness of medical treatises and of mantras, the assent-worthiness of the Veda is a function of the credibility of the testifier.' This is not meant to provide a definition of textual assent-worthiness, but rather a criterion for it. According to the commentators, a statement is assent-worthy if and only if it is true, and a testifier commands our assent if they are sincere, benevolent and have a 'direct knowledge' of things (*sākṣāt-kṛta-dharmatā*). In other words, the following is proposed as a sui generis epistemic norm in the ethics of belief: One should give one's assent to the assertions of a well-motivated expert. Applying this general principle to the Vedas, what it states is that one should assent to the declarations of those seers, prophets and wise men who are particularly insightful in the matters with which the Vedas deal and benevolent in their dealings with others. A later Naiyāyika, Vācaspati, will, to be sure, import a theological dimension to this discussion, and identify the credible testifier with God; but even then, it is not God's peculiar authority which explains the rationality of religious belief, but rather the derivation of religious epistemology from more general epistemic principles. Nothing in the above argument by itself implies that there has to be a single, ultimate, Vedic expert, any more than there needs to be, in medicine, a unique ultimate source of medical expertise. As in any branch of knowledge, expertise is distributed and skills are pooled.

Religion and Reason

The larger issue here has to do with the implied conception of the relationship between religion and reason. In framing the terms of the debate about scriptural authority as they have done, the Nyāya philosophers have, it might appear, sided with those who think that religion can and must be made subject to reason, and against those who see religion and reason as belonging to logically distinct domains of human endeavour. In Europe, the early

Enlightenment separation of philosophy and theology took the form of a commitment to the second of these positions. Spinoza, for example,[13] argued that what he called the 'fundamental principle of theology', namely that 'men are saved by obedience alone', can neither be proved nor refuted by the use of reason,[14] and he criticised both those who think that 'Scripture must be adapted to reason',[15] the first of whom, he claimed, was Maimonides, as well as those who, still failing to separate philosophy from theology, believe that 'reason should be a servant of Scripture'.[16] Of such people, Spinoza asks, 'What altar of refuge can a man find for himself when he commits treason against the majesty of reason?'[17] Among the various members of the Hindu caucus, a lively debate occurs about the relative epistemological priority of reason and scripture, some espousing subordination, others adaptation and only a few seeking the total separation of which Spinoza speaks. Early modern Nyāya, however, moves towards a position resembling European deism, admitting rational proofs for the existence of a supreme being (*īśvara*) but diminishing the role of 'revealed' religion.[18]

I HAVE BEEN ARGUING THAT IT IS A MISTAKE TO THINK THAT SECULARISM in the public sphere demands that participants revoke conceptions of the good grounded in religious affiliation. One main purpose of the above discussion is to identify the source of that mistake in an erroneous conception of the nature of religious affiliation itself, one which is strongly associated, historically, with the early Enlightenment in Europe. I have tried to establish, taking Hinduism as my example, that religious affiliation is not incompatible with what Spinoza calls 'the majesty of reason', but rather that, when properly understood, one can see it as supplying participants in public deliberation with appropriate resources with which to engage deliberatively with other participants, including participants whose conceptions of the good have groundings different from one's own.

In the next two chapters I will conduct a more searching analysis of the reason embedded within religion, and in particular begin to relate the above discussion to the themes explored in Part I of this book.

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[13] Benedict Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 [1670]).

[14] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, p. 191.

[15] Ibid., p. 186.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 194.

[18] John Vattanky, *Gaṅgeśa's Philosophy of God* (Madras: Adyar Library, 1984).

6

Adapt and Substitute

The Hermeneutics of Ritual

Plutarch said: 'At Athens, Lysimache, the priestess of Athene Polias, when asked for a drink by the mule drivers who had transported the sacred vessels, replied, "No, for I fear it will get into the ritual."'[1] There is reason within ritual. Ritual is not the merely mechanical repetition of an act whose form and content is fixed rigidly in advance. When G. K. Chesterton inveighed against 'the man of science, [who] not realising that ceremonial is essentially a thing which is done without a reason, has to find a reason for every sort of ceremonial',[2] he was wrong to deny reason to ritual, although he was right in his condemnation of the man of science, who seeks to reduce the reason in ritual to the reason in science. Whenever a ritual is performed, there are decisions to be made: about what to leave in, and what to leave out; about how to adapt the model to the circumstances. Ritual acts must 'fit' the situation in which they are performed, and ritual acts must 'work' (whatever it is for a ritual act to 'work', or preserve that which is essential to it qua ritual of a given type). The priestess of Athene Polias had to think about what made her ritual the ritual it was, and be led by this to decide which modifications are, and which are not, consistent with its unity and function.

In this chapter I will describe one model of the reason involved in making such choices. It is a model substantially derived from the ritual theory of the Mīmāṃsā, the Indian interpreters of Vedic ritual. Practical reason,

[1] Plutarch, *On Shyness*, 14, in his *Moralia* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1939), Vol. VI, p. 669.

[2] G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (New York: John Lane, 1905), p. 144.

in this model, is governed by relations of substitution and adaptation. It is a matter of deliberation about how a given blueprint or model for a ritual is to be instantiated in an actual ritual action in a particular context. I will then go on to argue that the intellectual virtues associated with reasoning about ritual are precisely those needed for ethical reasoning in general, showing how the account of reasoning in mainstream Hindu ritual theory becomes a general account of moral or practical reason.

Ethics in the Hindu Canon

The Hindu canon is traditionally said to have two parts. I have mentioned one part, the Veda, before; it is also called *śruti*, 'what is heard'. The Vedas are taken to consist essentially in an eternal, authorless body of ritual imperatives of the general schematic form 'One who desires heaven ought to perform the *agnihotra* sacrifice.' The *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* is the foundational text of a system of Vedic ritual theory. It is very difficult to date this text with any accuracy; perhaps in some form it already existed in 400 BCE and its compilation into the recension as we now have it took place in the following few centuries.[3] The best known of the Mīmāṃsā intellectuals are Śabara (*c.* 400 CE) and Kumārila (*c.* 650 CE).

The other part of the Hindu canon is made up of a variety of 'lawbooks' about *dharma*: moral, social and religious duty, including duties specific to the 'stations' of life. These lawbooks are collectively known as the *dharma-śāstra,* and they are also said to be *smṛti*, 'what is remembered'. The *Manu-smṛti* – the lawbook of Manu – is the most important and popular of such texts; its date of composition is the second to third centuries CE.[4] Medhātithi is one of several commentators; he lived in the second half of the ninth century or first half of the tenth century CE.[5] The relationship

[3] See Jean-Marie Verpoorten, *Mīmāṃsā Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987). Much of the *sūtra* literature is now thought to have achieved a relatively stable form by the first or second century CE, some strata of the texts invariably being of considerably greater antiquity. MS= *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra with Śabara's Bhāṣya*, ed. M. Nyayaratna (Calcutta, 1863–1877); trans. *The Mīmāṃsā-sūtra of Jaimini*, M. L. Sandal (Allahabad: B. D. Basu, 1925).

[4] *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 25.

[5] *Manu-smṛti with the Commentaries of Medhātithi et al.*, vols 1–6, ed. J. H. Dave (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1972–1984); trans. G. Jha, *Manusmṛti: The Laws of Manu with the Bhāṣya of Medhātithi*, vols 1–5 (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1920–1926).

between *smṛti* and *śruti* is fundamental to the umbrella conception of Hinduism as forms of religiousity in some way grounded in the Vedas. For it is in the *smṛti*, the codified tradition of religious instruction, rather than the *śruti*, the 'received' word describing by-and-large arcane ritual practices, that the actual duties of Hindus are described. We must ask how is it that the ethical rules of the *dharma-śāstra*, with their human redactors and group-specific rules, are to be justified, if it is the Veda which is the ultimate foundation of practical law.

From these works on duty and law, what can we learn about the reach of reason? Wilhelm Halbfass has said this:

> The *varṇāśrama-dharma* [theory of one's various duties], as understood by the 'orthodox' (*smārta*) core of the tradition and articulated in the Mīmāṃsā and Dharma-śāstra literature' leaves little room for rational ethical critique. . . . [A]ttempts from various directions to ethicize and universalize *dharma* are rejected or discarded by the tradition.[6]

One of my purposes in this chapter is to argue against that analysis of the ethical resources of Hinduism. I will seek to demonstrate instead that a distinctive form of ethical reasoning, a flexible model for internal critique, is centrally located within Hinduism and available to its participants. My thesis is that a model of *ritual reason*, introduced and developed in Mīmāṃsā as a means to reason about the proper way to perform, adapt and manipulate Vedic rituals, is transformed in the conceptual apparatus of *dharma-śāstra* into a model of *practical reason*, a method of reasoning about 'what is to be done' (*dharma*)[7] in a full range of deliberative contexts. The conception of moral reason sustained by the ritual model is particularist and situational, and has both important similarities with and clear differences from particularist ethics in the neo-Aristotelian tradition.[8]

[6] Wilhelm Halbfass, 'Dharma in Traditional Hinduism', in *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 332–3.

[7] Medhātithi, pp. 63: tasya [dharmasya] kartavyatāsvabhāvatvāt; cf. p. 59.

[8] For example, Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

The Reason of Sages

Somewhere in the Vedas, it is reportedly said:

> The gods came down from their world to this world, the sages followed them, and the people asked them 'How then are we going to live?' The sages revealed all the proper acts to them. And so, such reasoning (*tarka*) as the best of brahmins propound, it alone is sagely (*ārṣa*).[9]

This passage is quoted by Medhātithi in his commentary on Manu's *Manu-smṛti* 12.106. Manu himself is clear about the status of reason in matters of 'what is to be done'. The sacred texts and the tradition are above critique (*amīmāṃsye*), for moral law derives from them, and the use of reasoning (*hetuśāstra*) in opposition to them merits only social exclusion:

> 'Scripture' should be recognized as 'Veda,' and 'tradition' as 'Law Treatise'. These two should never be called into question in any matter, for it is from them that the Law (*dharma*) has shined forth. If a twice-born disparages these two by relying on the science of logic (*hetuśāstra*), he ought to be ostracized by good people as an infidel and a denigrator of the Veda.[10]

Clearly, the dissenting voice described in Chapter 5 would not have received Manu's favour; though the contrast between his recommendation to banish dissenters and the Nyāya attitude of rational engagement should be noted, especially since both are equally centrally Hindu attitudes. But there is more to Manu than this one declaration would have us believe. Indeed, he goes on to say that someone understands duty who, with reasoning (*tarka*) that does not contradict the teachings of the Veda, examines the instructions about *dharma* and the sages' revelations:

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[9] devā asmāl lokād amuṃ lokam āyaṃs tānṛṣayo 'nvīyus tānmanuṣyā abruvan katham atho bhaviṣyāmaḥ ebhyaḥ sarvakarmarṣayaḥ prāyacchat | tasmād yat brāhmaṇottamās tarkayaṃaty ārṣam eva tadbhavatīti śruteḥ ||

[10] Manu 2.10–11; trans. Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law.*

> The man who scrutinizes the record of the seers and the teachings of the Law by means of logical reasoning (*tarka*) not inconsistent with the vedic treatise – he alone knows the Law, and no one else.[11]

A contrast is made, through the use of two different terms for reason itself, *hetu* and *tarka*, between two forms of moral deliberation, one categorically dismissed and the other applauded to the highest degree (note the significant hyperbole in both statements).

Sceptical reasoning of the first sort, which questions the moral standing of actions enjoined in the Vedas, is alleged to involve itself in a performative contradiction, for the Vedas themselves are the source of the normative criteria against which any action is to be evaluated. To argue that ritual killing is sinful on the grounds that it is an act of violence like any other is to forget that the immorality of violence is laid out only by the Vedas themselves, whose status therefore as a source of knowledge about duty and law is presupposed by the criticism of them.[12] That might sound too easy, but it is a familiar move against sceptics of all persuasions.

Adaptive Reasoning from Paradigms

What about the use of reason that Manu praises? The commentators identify Manu's use of the term 'reason' (*tarka*) here with the kind of reasoning employed by the Mīmāṃsakas in thinking about the right and proper way to perform rituals. It is a form of reasoning that is embedded in a dialectical frame, involving the setting up of a dialogue between a prima facie view (a *pūrvapakṣa*), and a considered conclusion (*siddhānta*).[13] And:

> Reasoning (*tarka*) is an internal investigation involving adaptation (*ūha*) and exclusion; thus 'this is fit to be modified, this to be excluded'. When the *mantra* offered in a performance of the Saurya ritual is obtained from the [Āgneya] archetype 'devasya tvā savituḥ prasave 'śvinor bāhubhāṃ pūrṇo hastābhyām agnaye tvā juṣṭaṃ nirvāmi' [Vājasaneya Saṃhitā 2.11], the word 'agni' is excluded

[11] Manu 12.106.

[12] Medhātithi, pp. 62, 71.

[13] Medhātithi, p. 71 under Manu 2.10: na punarayamartho vedasyādyaḥ pūrvapakṣa utasvidyaḥ siddhānta ityeṣā mīmāṃsā niṣidhyate | yato vakṣyate 'yattarkeṇānusandhatte sa dharma veda netara iti ||

> because its meaning does not fit, and the word 'sūrya' is substituted. This reasoning is not inconsistent with the Veda.[14]

It would be inconsistent either to argue that the whole *mantra* should be dropped because it fails to fit the new context, or to argue that the *mantra* should be taken over directly in its unaltered form. The method of adaptation and substitution is commended instead as the proper way to reason.

The reference in the above quotation is to a sophisticated theory of reason developed by the Mīmāṃsakas in a particular context. The problem there was this: how ought one perform ritual acts whose details are only incompletely described in the Vedic texts? It is a species of what would now be called reasoning under uncertainty, working out what to do when one does not have the full facts at one's disposal. The method recommended by the Mīmāṃsakas consists in a procedure of transfer (*atideśa*), adaptation (*ūha*), and annulment (*bādha*) of details, from those 'model' (*prakṛti*) rituals whose performance is completely specified to those 'variant' (*vikṛti*) rituals the details of which are only incompletely given. As I noted in Chapter 4, an appropriate model for the variant ritual is selected according to criteria based on commonality of function, purpose and structure. A generic meta-rule for the transfer of details asserts that the variant is to be performed in the same manner as the model,[15] but the blanket rule is subject to caveats permitting the adaptation of transferred details to fit the new context, and the suspension or annulment of the transfer of a detail that has no place in the new ritual. The method of reasoning is pragmatic, situational and informal. Sound judgement and practical wisdom guide the process of selection and adaptation, rather than hard-and-fast rules. That is what makes this the reasoning (*tarka*) of the sages; they are the ones whose judgement is dependable. *Tarka*, sometimes called 'suppositional reason', is a style of reasoning that calls upon the reasoner to use skills of imagination, hypothesis and simulation in thinking through a new situation by means of the adaptation of an old one.[16]

Although it has its origins in a particular context, the Mīmāṃsā theory is clearly a theory of practical reason, a method for deciding what properly

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[14] Medhātithi, p. 485.

[15] Śabara under MS 9.3.1: yat prakṛtau kartavyaṃ tat vikṛtau iti | Cf. his remark under 7.1.12.

[16] See my *Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2001), Chapter 6, especially pp. 158–9, for more on this aspect of the nature of *tarka*.

is to be done. The pattern exemplified – taking a single instance and transferring its properties to the members of a class of resembling particulars, crops up many times and in many different contexts in ancient Indian literature. The logicians give it the nickname 'rice-in-the-pan' reasoning (*sthālīpulāka-nyāya*), for it is nicely illustrated by the reasoning that goes on when someone tests the firmness of one grain of rice in a cooking vessel, and infers on that basis whether the rest of the rice is cooked. This example is found in texts as diverse as the *Mahābhāṣya* (1.4.23), the *Ts'ing-mu* (a commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), and more especially in the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* itself (MS 7.4.12), where it is appealed to in order to resolve a methodological problem about the inferred transfer of ritual procedure to an incompletely specified ritual action.

The question arises as to whether, in deciding how to perform a ritual, one could transfer procedural details from ordinary acts, as well as from other Vedic ritual acts. The answer is that they should always be transferred from Vedic ritual acts, for this has been explicitly enjoined in at least some cases. So *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 7.4.12 says:

> As the sign is prior (*pūrvavat*), and as the injunctive verb is common to all, it may be indicated even by a single instance, as with the rice in the pan.

Śabara now comments:

> A sign which is prior to the detail (*nyāya*), being seen even in a single case, indicates the propriety of all equivalent (*tulya*) details. Just as one grain of rice cooked equally in a pot, on being pressed, makes known the state of the others too, on the ground that the same cause that made the tested grain soft is present in the case of other grains too. From all this it follows that in the case of all sacrifices (whose procedure has not been explicitly laid down), the Vedic procedure should be adopted.

The structure of such a pattern of reasoning is now clear: it consists in the transfer of a property from a known instance to relevantly similar other instances. What makes such reasoning possible, as Śabara's comment reveals, is the assumption of a common cause: that whatever it is that has caused the one grain of rice to become soft will similarly have made soft all other grains of rice equivalent in being in the same pan and under the same cooking conditions. Allowances can be made for variation in the

place of the rice in the pot and other such situational variables (this is the proper function of the reasoning called *ūha*, 'adaptation'). And when the model is extended from rice, through ritual, to moral deliberation more generally, an analogous requirement, this time of practical reason, emerges: that there is a stable moral order, just as there is a stable causal order, in virtue of which actions in one situation may serve as a guide to actions in other sufficiently commensurable situations (thus resonating with another of the many meanings of *dharma*, as that which 'upholds' or 'supports' people's moral actions). It is the guarantee that what is good at one time and place is good at others, a guarantee without which moral reasoning based on a method of transfer and modification would collapse. We would be left with a version of moral particularism in which the practical reasoner has to attend to the particular in all its isolated glory, unable to draw upon the rich resources of resemblance and situational adaptation. [17]

It is reasoning of precisely this kind that is used to justify those rules of conduct in the tradition (*smṛti*) which corresponds with no Vedic text. The problem is to explain moral innovation within an ahistorical framework. The gauntlet is thrown down in *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 1.3.1: if the law is rooted in the Vedas, then whatever is not Vedic is not dependable.[18] The reply in 1.3.2 is that reason (here, the term used is *anumāna*), specifically reasoning from a common cause, is the proper method for authenticating the tradition.[19] Our commentator, Śabara, explains that the form of reasoning involved begins with the premise that the persons who compiled the tradition and acted in accordance with them, were people of moral standing whose actions were fully guided by the Veda and who performed all their Vedic duties. It is said then to follow that since some of the rules they followed are in accordance with the Vedas, the others too must be so, and from this one may conclude that the authors of the tradition must have known and followed Vedic texts that are now lost to us. The inference is to a mislaid or forgotten Vedic basis for the rules of tradition. A similar strategy is seen at work in the explanation of linguistic change within a model of the fixed and eternal Sanskrit language. New linguistic usages,

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[17] Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) explicitly denies that a particular case's resemblance to other cases is relevant to its moral evaluation. One can see this as a limit-case of the model I am proposing, reached as we let the significance attached to resemblance tend to zero.

[18] dharmasya śabdamūlatvād aśabdam anapekṣaṃ syāt |

[19] MS 1.3.2: api vā kartṛsāmānyāt pramāṇam anumānaṃ syāt |

it is claimed, do not force a revision of the old rules, but are simply new discoveries in an infinite and partly lost reservoir of eternal grammatical rules.[20]

Another commentator, Kumārila, points out that if the conclusion of our inference is the existence of a lost Veda, then it is not an inference from particular to particular on the presumption of a common cause; rather, it takes that inference as a whole as the premise and infers to its presumption, the common cause, as its conclusion. So he reconstructs the argument of MS 1.3.2 as a sort of inference to the best or only consistent explanation (*arthāpatti*): the only consistent explanation of the claims about law and duty recorded in the tradition is that they report the contents of now lost Vedas. Both agree, however, that the reasoning in question is not a species of consequential evaluation. The practical reasoner does not look to the consequences of the act, or to the perceived consequences of resembling acts, as they do when they infer that it will rain because the ants are carrying their eggs. That is to say, the reasoning is not from effect to cause (*śeṣavat*) but from cause to effect (*pūrvavat*).

The implication of this argument is that the Vedas are to be regarded not as a limited and specific collection of moral rules, but as an idealised method for moral knowledge. To say of some maxim for action that it is indeed a norm for good conduct is to say that it meets those formal criteria that would entitle us to infer back to a now lost Veda to which it corresponds. In particular, a Vedic injunction mentions no particular, contains no proper name and so is fully general in its application. In a discussion about the legitimacy of regional customs (MS 1.3.15–23), a *prima facie* view is put forward that the Vedic rule that legitimates a regional custom must specify the specific region in which the rule applies.[21] That view is rejected, however, on the grounds that genuinely moral duties must apply in all regions, for that is the nature of such duties.[22] This is not to say that the ritual model of duty is a model of unconditional duty, for there is in Mīmāṃsā a well attested distinction between occasional (*naimittika*) and obligatory (*nitya*) ritual duties. Rather, the point is that geography is not a consideration in the evaluation of moral resemblance. The moral relevance

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[20] The point is made well by Madhav Deshpande, 'Historical Change and the Theology of Eternal Sanskrit', *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebeite der indogermanischen Sprachen* 99 (1985), pp. 122–49.

[21] MS 1.3.15: anumānavyavyasthānāt tatsaṃyuktam pramāṇaṃ syāt |

[22] MS 1.3.16: api vā sarvadharmaḥ syāt, tannyāyaytvād vidhānasya |; MS 1.3.18: liṅgābhāvac ca nityasya |

of time, however, is clearly recognised in this model: *when* one performs an action can matter in ways that *where* one performs it never can.[23]

Let me summarise and take stock. The general model of reason under consideration is this one: *x* is *F*, *y* resembles *x* in salient respects; therefore, *y* is *F*. The same general model is exemplified in a number of contexts: empirical prediction, ritual practice, and moral deliberation.

Case 1: Rice.	That grain of rice is cooked. This grain is like that one (both have been in the pan for the same time, etc.) *Therefore*, this grain of rice is cooked too.
Case 2: Ritual.	That ritual is performed thus-and-so. This ritual is like that one (that is the model of which this is a variant). *Therefore*, this ritual is performed thus-and-so too.
Case 3: Rules.	That rule is Vedic. This rule is like that one (both are followed by a virtuous man). *Therefore*, this rule is Vedic too.
Case 3 (variant).	That rule is Vedic. This rule is like that one (both share certain formal properties, such as generality, impartiality, etc.). *Therefore*, this rule is Vedic too.

This is the particularist and situational model of reason, one which has been developed in the context of ritual theory and then transformed into a general conception of practical reasoning and ethical deliberation. In attaching central importance to resemblances between relevantly similar cases, it is a model at remove from contemporary versions of moral particularism.

Practical reason or moral deliberation (*tarka*) extracts the norm from the particular and re-applies it to other resembling particulars. The process of extraction presupposes that there is a common cause, a stability in goodness (*dharmanityatā*), in virtue of which what is good here and now can be a guide to what is good somewhere else. Different norms, extracted from different particulars and resting on different judgements of

[23] A fact possibly related to the migratory habits of the ancient Aryans.

resemblance, will sometimes collide. They are then measured against each other in the to-and-fro of a public dialectical process (*vāda*) that first seeks out agreed sites of conflict and then creates a measure with which to adjudicate competing claims of resemblance (this, in fact, is why both a Nyāya logician and a Mīmāṃsa exegete must be present at the *pariṣad* gathering). Norms extracted from particulars will be group-specific (*āśramadharma*, *svadharma*) to the extent that they are local approximations of more general laws, or if they are descriptive of practice and custom, but must seek to be universal (*sanātanadharma*, *sādhāraṇadharma*) if they are to be morally binding (which is what being 'Vedic' amounts to here). And when, for example, the norms of different religions or philosophies or cultures collide, each with its own non-negotiable claim to rest on an ultimate ground of value, one is forced to re-examine the derivation of those norms from the ultimate ground, the particulars one has chosen as exemplary and the judgements one has made about relations of resemblance. The confrontation of incommensurate systems of value is the occasion for a dialectical revaluation of the relationship between moral deliberation and the stable grounds of goodness. Individuals create such confrontations of their own whenever they juxtapose texts from different cultures and in doing so make explicit the normative frames implicit within those texts. The method of reasoning from cases, the original ritual reasoning of the Mīmāṃsā, is thus a generalisable method for reasoning one's way to an identity, as well as a method to be drawn on in secular acts of public reason.

What I have tried to show in this discussion is how the materials for an account of public and practical reason can be derived from the resources available to a given participant, here that of the Hindu. To be sure, the texts of traditional Hinduism are not without their well-documented share of sectarian hyperbole, but closer inspection reveals a hidden richness and flexibility in the resources of reason they sustain. This process of retrieval of a religious culture's hidden resources is essential, I have argued, in confronting fundamentalist and dogmatic appropriations of the culture, and equally essential in countering the false claim that only with a repudiation of religious affiliation is one entitled to enter the public space of reasons of secular democratic dialogue.

7

Model Humans and Moral Instincts

Persons as Paradigms of Exemplary Conduct

Manu identifies the Veda and the dharma treatises (*śruti* and *smṛti*) as two out of four foundations of ethical duty. The others are the conduct of good people and the approval of the heart. He says:

> Learn the Law (*dharma*) always adhered to by people who are erudite, virtuous, and free from love and hate, the Law assented to by the heart.[1]
>
> The root of the Law (*dharma*) is the entire Veda; the tradition (*smṛti*) and practice of those who know the Veda; the conduct of good people; and what is pleasing to oneself.[2]
>
> Veda, tradition, the conduct of good people, and what is pleasing to oneself – these, they say, are the four visible marks of the Law.[3]

Who is a good person (a *sad* or *sādhu*)? A good person, our commentator explains, is someone who, acting in a manner circumscribed by evidence (*pramāṇa*), directs their efforts towards obtaining what is valuable and avoiding what has no value. Such a man must be knowledgeable or learned (*vedavit*; *śiṣṭa*), and, indeed, be good because knowledgeable. Here, to be knowledgeable is, by definition, to be well versed both in the nature of reason and evidence and in the contents of the texts. Such a person must

[1] Manu 2.1; trans. Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[2] Manu 2.6.

[3] Manu 2.12.

also be free from hatred and greed, since hatred and greed motivate even knowledgeable people to perform improper acts. Freeing oneself from the base motivations is, indeed, what it is to possess virtue (*śīla*). I will discuss these requirements upon intellectual virtue, in Chapter 11.

Good persons, then, are persons who try to instantiate in their actions the *dharma*, the actions that are 'to be done'. They will use reason to interpret and apply the model actions prescribed in the Vedas, both within and outside the ritual sphere. But how does a good person function as a 'foundation' of prescribed deed? It is because their conduct is exemplary – in the quite literal sense of being at once an exemplar (an instance) and an example (to be followed). As such they can play a role in moral reasoning exactly akin to the role played by the archetypal 'model' ritual in the Mīmāṃsakas' description of ritual reason. You adapt what you know of their conduct and apply it to your own circumstances. As I will stress in Chapter 13, this need not imply any will to make yourself into them.

Kumārila interprets *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 1.3.5–7 as referring to the problem of the conduct of the good.[4] One might well think that it is acceptable to take the conduct and teachings of leaders of other religions as morally exemplary as long as it is compatible with the Vedas; for example, the Buddha's instructions about the founding of public parks and the practices of meditation, truthfulness, non-violence, and charity. Kumārila's somewhat disappointing response is that there is a limit on what can count as an authority. The Buddha and other religious teachers are not 'good', because although their conduct is sometimes in accordance with the Vedic prescriptions, it is also often not. Their good deeds and teachings, Kumārila argues, are mixed up with and dissolve into bad ones, just like powdered alum vanishes into molten gold. More tellingly, Kumārila says that truths about the law, that are so mixed up with untruth, are based on false reason, or rather false uses of attested patterns of reasoning. The transferential patterns of moral reasoning we have been considering can still lead to truth even if they begin with false paradigms and proceed via false resemblances, just as any invalid argument may happen to have a true conclusion. However, the very fact that the flexibility implicit in the 'adapt and substitute' model can be used, as Kumārila does here, in a dogmatic and intolerant way, also confirms the point I made in the previous chapter, that it is a resource for creative as well as dogmatic thinking.

[4] Kumārila, *Tantravārttika*, ed. G. Sastri (Varanasi: Benares Sanskrit Series 2, 1882–1903); trans. G. Jha (Calcutta: Sri Garib Das Oriental Series 9, 1903–1924).

Kumārila must in any case be careful how heavily he relies on 'mixedness' as a disqualifier, for he also has to explain away the apparent misdeeds of the 'good' people in the epics and ancient stories, such as the professedly celibate Vyāsa (notional author of the *Mahābhārata*), who had children by the wives of his younger brother, the excessive drinking of Vāsudeva and Arjuna, and the polyandry of Draupadī. Kumārila had better not argue himself into a position where these deeds dissolve the goodness of the individuals concerned.

Kumārila raises a version of the puzzle familiar to us from Plato's *Euthyphro*:

> You think those people to be good whose conduct is good; and you hold such conduct to be good as consists in the acts of good people; and thus there being a circularity, neither of the two is established.[5]

His answer is that when practical reasoners take the practices of the good as a guide in their moral conduct, they tend to forget that those practices are themselves good only because the person's actions are a model for good conduct as made known by the Vedas. When a good person engages in new practices, not themselves directly mentioned in the Vedas, using their moral reason in a process of transfer, modification, and substitution, our entitlement to regard these new practices as themselves good is derived from an argument, the very same argument indeed that certified the tradition as a proper extension of the sacred canon. The normative grounds of moral conduct spread out from the narrow confines of Vedic ritual through a mechanism of transfer, adaptation, and annulment that is the proper method in moral deliberation.

The same mechanism shows how group-specific forms of moral conduct arise – in the extrapolation of conduct not from one good brahmin to all people, but only to other brahmins, or from one kṣatriya only to others. Relations of resemblance underpin the manufacture of group-specific rules of conduct. The very method by which general maxims are derived as extrapolation from particulars implies that the rules that result will be situational: their scope will be of the form 'this and what is similar to it'. Yet, as Kumārila astutely points out, one gradually 'loses sight of the fact that such rules are only occasional (*naimittika*), and come to think of them as obligatory (*nitya*)'.[6] The ascent of duties specific to caste and

[5] *Tantravārttika*, p. 183.

[6] Ibid., p. 186.

social status, one might speculate, is the result of a similar mistake, this time about which aspects of resemblance are relevant to the extrapolation of right and wrong; relations of moral resemblance need not track analogies in social standing. This is not to say that there are no group-specific duties: a daughter has duties that a mother does not have, and vice versa. New rules generalise from historical circumstance, and strive to do so in a way that will transform them from codes of good conduct into binding moral obligations.

Ethical Dilemmas: The 'Case' (*Kasus*)

I have been arguing that rational methods developed by the Mīmāṃsakas to deal with situations of ritual *under-specification* found a wider domain of application in ethical deliberation. Something similar is true of the situation of *over-specification*, or conflict. As I described in Chapter 5, there is no shortage of examples of Vedic prescriptions that appear to contradict one another, such as 'Pour the libation before the sun has risen' and 'Pour the libation when the sun has risen,' or 'Hold the *śoḍaṣi* vessels at the *atirātra*' and 'Do not hold the *śoḍaṣi* vessels at the *atirātra*'. Conflicts arise too within the tradition, as well as between the tradition and the sacred scriptures. Reason is the court of appeal in which such conflicts are adjudicated. One of the traditional authorities, Yājñavalkya, states clearly that 'In case of a conflict between two traditional authorities, reasoning (*nyāya*) guided by practice is what has the strength [to resolve it].'[7] In some cases, it may be possible to argue that no genuine conflict arises. A standard Mīmāṃsā strategy for diffusing conflict is to argue that one of the prescriptions is not really an injunction (*vidhi*) but rather merely a commendation (*arthavāda*); another is to show that there is a relation of mutual complementarity (*ākāñkṣā*) between the two rules – that one is a general rule and the other a special case, or that the two rules lack a common subject.[8]

But there remain many cases of genuine conflict, in which two rules are equally and properly applicable to a given particular. Following André Jolles, let us call such a situation a 'case' (*Kasus*). In his short formalist

[7] Yājñavalkya 2.1: smṛtyor virodhe nyāyas tu balavān vyavyahārataḥ; cf. *Vyavahāra-cintāmaṇi* 10: paraspara-virodhe tu nyāya-yuktam pramāṇatvāt |; both cited in Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India* (California: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 161–8.

[8] Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law*, pp. 160–1. Cf. MS 2.1.46.

treatise, *Einfache Formen,*[9] Jolles identifies nine basic forms of thought as expressed in language: the legend, the saga, the myth, the riddle, the proverb, the case, the memoir, the tale, and the joke. While the function of the legend is to illustrate or exemplify a particular moral value in ideal conduct, the function of the 'case' is to test the norms themselves in a specific instance. Following this distinction, we might say that the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with its narrative of the ideal Rāma, is a legend, and the *Mahābhārata*, fermenting with moral ambiguity, is a *Kasus*, a case. A case is a problem in which conflicting sets of norms are balanced one against another, and in the process turn themselves into the objects of evaluation:

> What is peculiar to the form 'case', however, lies in the fact that it asks a question but cannot give an answer, that it leaves the duty of the decision to us but does not contain the decision in itself – what is realised in it is the weighing, but not the result of the weighing. . . . In the case, the temptations and difficulties of balancing lay before us.. . . we could say that in this form is realised the swinging back and forth of the mental activity of weighing and weighing-up.[10]

Jolles illustrates his idea of the case-form with one of the stories from Somadeva's well-known *Ocean of the Stream of Stories* (*Kathāsaritsāgara*). It is the story of three suitors 'all equally virtuous and accomplished', courting the beautiful daughter of a pious brahmin. All of a sudden, she develops a fever and dies. The three suitors respond to this unexpected turn of events in different ways: after she had been cremated, one 'made a bed of her ashes and began to live off alms'; the second took her bones to the Ganges. The third became a renunciant and began to wander through the land, and in the course of his wanderings came upon a magical spell, a *mantra* that could bring the dead back to life. He steals the *mantra*, rushes back, and revitalises his beloved. The three suitors, of course, then begin to squabble. One says 'She is my wife because I brought her back to life with my *mantra*.' One says 'She is my wife because I brought her back to life by visiting a sacred pilgrimage spot.' The third says 'She is my wife because I looked after her ashes and brought her back to life through my penance.' At this point a *vetāla*, the malicious spirit who has been narrating the story, asks King Trivikrama sena, to whom the story is being narrated, to adjudicate. The king is asked to adjudicate between three competing

[9] André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1965).

[10] Ibid., p. 191.

norms, three claims to be the one who in his actions most resembles a husband. The king replies thus: 'The one who gave her life is like a father. . . . The one who took her bones to the Ganges is like a son. The one who slept on her ashes and practiced austerities in the cremation ground is the one fit to be her husband because his actions were motivated by true love.'

What is the measure here, in a 'measuring of measure against measure' (Jolles)? Consider first the case where there is a conflict between a sacred scripture and a traditional treatise, which implies a conflict between some known Vedic passage, on the one hand, and an inference back to some lost or no longer known Vedic source on the other. The *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* position is that 'in the event of a contradiction, there is no need [for the back-inference], for it is only when there is no [contradiction] that an inference [is made]' (MS 1.3.3). According to Śabara, what this means is that in a conflict between an extant Vedic text and a rule of conduct in the tradition, the inference to a lost Veda that would justify the tradition does not even get off the ground. One might worry that this threatens to undermine the justification for the entire body of tradition, for there is an endless number of misplaced Vedic passages. Who is to be sure that among them there is not one that contradicts any given traditional text? Another commentator, Kumārila, is clearly aware of the defeasible nature of inferential justification – he says that a traditional authority contradicted by an (as yet) unknown Veda would be like a fake coin which has not yet been found out; both have currency until the defeater turns up. He re-describes the case as one of preemption: the inference back to a lost Veda that would justify the rule is preempted by the 'speedier' extant Vedic passage. The inference would have justified the contradicted norm had it not been preempted (like someone being poisoned and then shot before the poison has a chance to take effect), and the inference does justify a norm just as long as no defeater comes to light. So it is not that contradicted traditional treatises are exceptions to the general rule, but rather the general rule is suspended (preempted) by a contradicting Vedic passage. Kumārila says that 'when two measures are found to contradict each other, . . . the point at issue can be decided only by a third measure',[11] and he suggests here that the third measure is proximity to the ultimate goal. In this case the goal is the prescription of an act that ought to be done, and the Vedic injunction, which stipulates an act explicitly, reaches its goal long before the passage from the tradition, which has to take the back route by way of an inference to some lost Vedic stipulation.

11 Ibid., pp. 147–8.

Medhātithi, Manu's commentator, prefers to claim that a contradicted traditional treatise retains its normative force, even if it is overridden: 'It is only natural that what is directly expressed should override what has been only indirectly indicated, and so is remoter and hence weaker. But from this it does not follow that what has been over-ruled loses its validity.'[12] He goes on to compare this with the analogous case that arises when the Mīmāṃsaka reasons from 'model' ritual to variant. In such reasoning, the explicit always over-rides the implicit. For a specific injunction pertaining to the variant will always take precedence over the inferential transfer of a detail from the model in accordance with the generic meta-rule.[13] Here again 'proximity' is the measure against which the conflicting rules are compared, but now it is a method for deciding which of two conflicting norms is the defeator and which the defeated.

The Heart's Approval: Moral Instinct

Such methods of adjudication work as long as the norms in conflict are of different kinds – one more proximate, more direct, and less dependent. But what if the rules are *entirely* on a par; that is, as Kumārila puts it, like two men standing on the same step? What if there are two equally exemplary model rituals which promote incompatible modes of performance, or two equally good persons recommending incompatible courses of action? The conflict then is between competing claims of resemblance, just as it was in the case of the three suitors. One will have to choose between norms that do not arrange themselves conveniently along axes of proximity, directness or logical dependence, and one will have to bear in mind that choosing one norm does not deprive the other of its normative pull. When two Vedic injunctions are directly incompatible, the Mīmāṃsakas say that the practical reasoner has an 'option' (*vikalpa*), but Kumārila reminds us that choosing one does not make the other one go away:

> In the case of injunctions [enjoining incompatibly the use of] barley or rice, at the time that we accept the latter and use the rice at the sacrifice, we impose upon the former injunction an invalidity which is altogether foreign to it; and in the same manner, at the time that we accept the other alternative and make use of the barley, the extrinsic invalidity that had been imposed upon it is overridden by its own

[12] Medhātithi, p. 65. This might also be Kumārila's ultimate position.

[13] Cf. MS 5.1.19–21 – the so-called *sākamedhīya-nyāya*. See also 6.5.54.

> inherent validity; especially is such the case because of both the texts being equal in their authority, both equally forming part of the same Veda, and there being no difference between the two with regard to the proximity or otherwise of their respective goals.[14]

This is not the only time we meet with the idea of a forced suspension of duty. Manu's theory of the four *yuga*s or Ages (Manu 1.84–6) has the duties of man gradually narrowing with each worsening age. The implication is not that there are different duties appropriate to each of the four ages, but that the diminution in man's capacities and longevity renders him capable of performing only some of the duties that befall him; the remainder continue to be duties but ones he is no longer capable of performing.[15] The same might be said of the theory of *āpad-dharma*, the temporary suspension of duties in times of emergency. The duties remain in force but the times render them impossible to fulfil. And it is the same too in situations of moral conflict. When norms of equal standing are thrown together in a specific case, suspension rather than revision is the preferred model in the resolution of moral conflict.[16]

I have said that the choice between incompatible but otherwise equal rules or values is not merely arbitrary. But what are the reasons left to us in choosing how to weigh up competing claims of resemblance? I return, finally, to the last of Manu's four 'foundations' of *dharma*: the heart's approval (*ātmatuṣṭi*).[17] One suggestion is that the emotions, such as inner satisfaction and contentment, are a guide in the evaluation of values: just as the mongoose eats only those herbs that are antidotes to poison, and we say that whatever the mongoose bites is for that reason an antidote to poison, so the learned and good are led by their hearts to choose what is right, and we say that whatever the learned and good do is, for that reason, itself good.[18] That is, in perfectly unconflicted cases, the good person has been following

[14] *Tantravārttika*, p. 137.

[15] Such examples show that the moral theory emerging here disagrees with the Kantian dictum that 'ought implies can'.

[16] Related ideas can be found in Bernard Williams, 'Ethical Consistency', in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

[17] For a discussion of the sources, see Donald Davis Jr., 'On *ātmatuṣṭi* as a source of *dharma*,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127, 3 (2007), pp. 279–96. The term is sometimes translated as 'conscience' (see further Chapter 11 below).

[18] Medhātithi, p. 68.

the heart all along; so in absence of the usual guides, that is one to be trusted. The poet Kālidāsa likewise has Duṣyanta say: 'In matters where doubt intervenes, the inclination of the heart of a good person becomes the best measure.'

Another idea, though, is that the heart's approval is not merely an indicator; rather, it actually *creates* the measure with which to measure one measure against another. Kumārila puts the idea thus: just as whatever goes into a salt mine turns into salt, so whatever a person learned in the Veda utters, it becomes Vedic.[19] Medhātithi expresses the point even more forcefully: the calmness of mind of a good man can turn wrong into right and right into wrong.[20] Can moral instinct really ever be constitutive of value? The calm king Trivikramasena solved the riddle and closed the case by choosing the suitor whose conduct was most similar to that of a husband, and in doing so he chose to select certain aspects of resemblance over and above others. There was no one right answer: all we can say is that his decision closed the case, and it did so because the decision was made by a person of discernment. The point is that the claims of the other suitors do not disappear; they remain intact but are forced into suspension by the king's decision. When competing norms are in the balance, a choice for one tilts the scales, but the other does not lose its entitlement to make a claim. Still, when the matter is one of competing claims of resemblance, moral instinct is what judgement consists of, and that suffices, in spite of the contrary, now-suppressed claims. A conflict makes us question the resemblances upon which our norms rest, forces us to decide which are relevant, which less so, and in these matters of resemblance, only the heart can be the judge.

I have emphasised the importance of identifying internal voices of dissent and I have said that the point is to understand how the resources of reason within the culture *make possible* the forms of dissent exemplified, the larger point being that it is precisely because intellectual cultures are *self-critical entities* that there is scope for rational choice in the formation of an identity. It is central to the thesis of this book that one can understand how this occurs only if one pays attention to the *detail* of the Indian theory. I will therefore soon undertake a careful, detailed examination of the most powerful and theoretically sophisticated of all the dissenting voices within Indian culture: Śrīharṣa. His ambition is

19 *Tantravārttika*, p. 188.
20 Medhātithi, p. 68.

nothing less than to turn the resources of reason within this culture upon themselves in order to undermine all pretensions to truth-seeking. That the use of reason in the search for truth is problematic was recognised well before Śrīharṣa though, and I will begin be retrieving several earlier sources of sceptical dissent. I have already located one dissenting voice within the dialogical framework of the *Nyāya-sūtra*; it will turn out that there are others, similarly embedded and again rather hidden, in the commentaries on the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* and the *Brahma-sūtra*.

8

Implied Voices of Dissent

The Paradox of Inquiry

So far in this book I have taken it to be unproblematic that reason is available to an individual as a resource in the search for answers to their questions, especially those questions that bear upon their choices. Yet there is something deeply perplexing about rational inquiry: its teleology and indeed its very possibility.[1] So Plato thought, sharing between Meno and Socrates the presentation of what has become known as 'Meno's Paradox', the claim that one can apparently inquire neither into what one knows, nor into what one does not know:

> Meno: How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?
>
> Socrates: I know what you want to say, Meno. Do you realize what a debater's argument you are bringing up, that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know? He cannot search for what he knows – since he knows it, there is no need to search – nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for. (Meno 80d5-e5)

[1] An extended version of the material in this chapter and the next, co-written with A. D. Carpenter, appears as 'Can You Seek the Answer to This Question?' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88 (2010), pp. 571–94.

Meno here asks two questions of Socrates, one to do with beginnings, the other with endings: How can you get started in inquiry? How can you know when your search has come to an end? Socrates interprets this as asking how inquiry could happen at all: either you have already finished, or else there is no way to begin. What can be made of the supposed dilemma? First, Socrates' version of Meno's paradox clearly rests on an equivocation. Inquiry only becomes otiose when the phrase 'knowing *x*' is taken to mean 'knowing everything that there is to know about *x*'. On the other hand, it is impossible to move forward in inquiry only when I have absolutely no idea at all what sort of thing, at even the most basic level of sortality – object, event, quality – *x* is. This absolute ignorance on which the second lemma relies is, however, not the contradictory of the complete knowledge which the first lemma requires. The proper contradictory of 'One is in a state of absolute ignorance' is 'One is not in a state of absolute ignorance', a condition consistent with any epistemic achievement better than or equal to having the vaguest intimations. Spelling out the equivocation makes clear the middle road that we immediately feel Socrates has left out: the hazy idea, educated guess, suspicion and partial knowledge that seem so clearly to license further inquiry.

Secondly, though, while Socrates 'overlooks' this middle ground, it is evident that Plato does not. In fact, the middle ground of belief and true belief occupies much of Plato's attention throughout the dialogues. That the oversight is not Plato's is demonstrated by the role [true] belief plays at the end of the *Meno*. 'We are poor specimens, you and I, Meno,' Socrates is given to say (96d5), for having overlooked the fact that people often have not just beliefs, but even true beliefs – following which they can make progress. In fact, you don't even need true beliefs to make progress in inquiry: the whole starting point of the *elenchus*, and of Socratic method, was the interlocutor's beliefs. And we do all patently have beliefs. The fact that we do have beliefs, at least some of which are true (whether or not we are able to recognise them as such) is all that is needed to resolve Socrates' riddle.

The third point to observe is that it is not clear that Meno and Socrates are posing the same question. Meno's first question is methodological: (1) How do you go about looking for something: how do you make sure your methods fit the object? His second is epistemological: (2) How do you know when you've finally got a grip on the world with your thought? How do you recognise which of your thoughts, and at which stage your thoughts, capture (or represent) the world as it actually is? Socrates seems

to point to a conceptual problem: What is the conceptual framework required for posing a question and setting about answering it? We might think that one thing the geometrical demonstration with the slave brings out is just how much conceptual apparatus one must have at one's disposal in order to pose or understand a question. To an extent, any old beliefs will do to get one started in inquiry, but only with the proviso that 'equal', 'same', 'different', 'good' are also clear and present to one. Without a grasp of certain basic concepts, posing a question is conceptually impossible.

Meno suggests that searching might be random (or be subject to accidental constraints), and it may be unclear when to stop. Socrates replies that this would make *inquiry* – the intentional *searching* for specific knowledge – impossible. It is this paradox, one which purports to show the impossibility of inquiry, we will be exploring. Plato offers no explicit resolution of the paradox. 'Recollection', which Socrates trots out in reply, is so obviously incapable of resolving the paradox that even Socrates is made to have misgivings about whether his little myth is true. If Plato offers any suggestion of a way out of the paradox, he does so only implicitly in the *Meno* by magically introducing 'belief' later in the dialogue, and then for other purposes. He does not explicitly attempt to motivate the paradox, or demonstrate why it is more serious than just a 'debaters' set-piece'.

Any motivation for the paradox, and any recognition that it is a serious one, has come from commentators trying to resolve it or making suggestions as to how Plato would resolve it. According to some, Plato's resolution of the paradox is that inquiry is possible because you all already have some beliefs (some cognitive states lower than knowledge but greater than complete ignorance) and the ability to reason about them; it may be that some of those beliefs need to be true, and perhaps in addition you need to be able to recognise those true beliefs *as* true. Or we might rather, with Aristotle, distinguish different senses of knowing, if that would help; some would argue that you need also to be able to recognise discrepancies between beliefs; other commentators wonder whether (given the demonstration with the slave-boy) you would add the need of a distinct questioner, in order to bring these discrepancies to your attention, as a further requirement for the possibility of inquiry; some, recognising the need for inquiry to be a directed activity, have proposed that makeshift specifications of the end suffice to get you going in inquiry. Or it may be that there can only ever be a pragmatic solution to the paradox. All of these suggestions have come from later thinkers, in their reflections on the paradox. Plato himself left us only the puzzle, and a few puzzling hints.

Inquiry as Adjudication

The idea of rational inquiry is introduced in the very first line of the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra*, a central text in the Sanskrit philosophical canon, and one which I have said a good deal about in earlier chapters: 'Now, consequently, [begins] an inquiry into moral duty' (*Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 1.1.1). The text thus declares itself to be a sustained inquiry into the foundations of moral duty (*dharma*). But the commentators I will look at use this opening statement in order to raise, and attempt to exorcise, the spectre of the threat that there is a paradox in the very idea of inquiry with reason.

Our first commentator, Śabara (*c.* 400 CE), formulates the Paradox of Inquiry thus:

> It must either be perfectly well known (*prasiddha*)[2] what moral duty is, or else not so known (*aprasiddha*). If it is well known, there will be no inquiry (lit. 'desire to know': *jijñāsā*). If, however, it is not so known, then all the more no [inquiry]. So this work on the inquiry into moral duty is quite pointless.[3]

There is, here, the same formulation of the paradox as a destructive dilemma we witnessed in Plato. There is, it should be stressed, no hint or suggestion that any Indian author has read or is aware of the earlier Greek discussion.[4] It is remarkable enough that the self-same paradox should be recognised in two ancient intellectual cultures, especially when

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[2] The term *prasiddha* is used several times in the texts we are discussing. A past participle from the verb *sidh-* 'to achieve, accomplish' with the verbal prefix *pra-*, its common meaning is 'renowned, famous, celebrated' (German: 'bekannt'). The sense is of something generally accepted or commonly agreed to be the case. The Sanskrit verb *jñā* 'to know, learn, find out, recognise' is cognate with 'know'; but the derived noun *jñāna* is used in philosophical Sanskrit with a meaning more akin to 'belief', the term employed for 'knowledge' being instead *pramā*.

[3] dharmaḥ prasiddho vā syād aprasiddho vā | sa cet prasiddho, na jijñāsyaḥ | athāprasiddho, natarām | tad etad anarthakaṃ dharmajijñāsāprakaraṇam | . (Śabara, *Mīmāṃsāsūtrabhāṣya*, inf. 1.1.1, MSB 14,21–15,2).

[4] One may have serious reservations in general about the 'diffusion' thesis, as defended most recently and elaborately by Thomas McEvilley in *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002). There are at least two alternatives to supposing an actual transmission of ideas: one is that the co-occurrence of similar ideas in Greece and India is due to their having a common origin in an Indo-European 'protophilosophy'; the other is that the deepest philosophical problems are essentially 'perennial' or culture nonspecific. For the first hypothesis, see the

we consider how many of the modern commentators on Plato have, in one way or another, understood the paradox as a peculiarly Platonic problem.

The etymology of the Sanskrit *jijñāsā* (translated 'inquiry') relates 'inquiry' not to asking questions but to wanting knowledge (the noun deriving from a desiderative of the verb 'to know'). The paradox is thus a paradox about desire: desiring implies an acknowledged lack, and the point is that one cannot have a desire either for what one already has or for what one does not know one lacks. Śabara's resolution of the paradox sees inquiry as consisting in the search for a resolution of conflict between different pre-existing understandings of morality, rather than as constructing such an understanding *ab initio*:

> Reply: On the contrary, [inquiry] does have a point. For different people have different understandings (*vipratipannā*) regarding the nature of moral duty. Some say the moral duty is one thing, others something else. One who strives to perform an act without having considered (*vicārya*)[5] this [controversy with respect to *dharma*] may adopt any old thing and may be thwarted and come to harm. Therefore one should inquire into the nature of moral duty. For we insist that this is what connects a person with the highest good.[6]

Śabara's suggestion is that inquiry can commence only when people already have beliefs, indeed conflicting beliefs, about the nature of the object of the inquiry: an inquiry aims at the resolution of conflict under conditions of disagreement. But we might worry that such a solution overlooks the possibility that people are just using terms differently. For what is there to guarantee that the various beliefs people have under the same label 'moral duty' do indeed have a common reference? What ensures, in other words, that the different parties are not simply talking at cross purposes?

We must remember, though, that Śabara has earlier said that an inquiry into moral duty can commence only if one has already made a

work of Nicholas J. Allen, for instance his review article 'Thomas McEvilley: The Missing Dimension', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 9/1–3 (2005), pp. 59–75; for the second, the work of B. K. Matilal, about which I will say more in Chapter 15, is representative.

5 The Sanskrit *vicārya* 'having deliberated, considered, examined, discussed, investigated', is a causative derivation from the verb *vicar-* 'to wander about, roam over'. cf. *vikāra* in Chapter 1.

6 athavā arthavat. dharmaṃ prati hi vipratipannā bahuvidaḥ | kecid anyaṃ dharmam āhuḥ, kecid anyam | so 'yam avicārya pravartamānaḥ kaṃcid eva upādadāno vihanyeta anartham ca ṛcchet | tasmād dharmo jijñāsitavyaḥ | sa hi niḥśreyasena puruṣaṃ saṃyunakti iti pratijānīmahe | (Śabara, *Mīmāṃsāsūtrabhāṣya*, MSB 16,3–16,6)

study of the texts that prescribe it (the Vedas). Perhaps that is enough to anchor people's various beliefs to a common reference point. The texts have given us a range of exemplary cases of right acts. You may agree, more or less, about which acts are rightly done, but disagree over what their rightness consists in. An inquiry takes as its starting point this concord over extension and discord over intension, and seeks, somehow, to reach an adjudication. Śabara in effect concedes the force of Meno's point that with no knowledge at all of the object, one would know neither how to begin an inquiry nor when it had ended; his answer is to restrict the ambitions of inquiry itself. Thus his resolution of the paradox is similar to Plato's (on certain readings of it): as a matter of fact, you simply do have a lot of beliefs already, wherever they might have come from. Śabara adds explicitly what commentators have tried to find in the *Meno*, namely that among your beliefs are some true ones, and that your natural preference or tendency is towards the true, rather than the false beliefs.

Śabara in fact specifies the sorts of (largely true) beliefs that must pre-exist the inquiry: if you want to inquire into the nature of *x*, you must have been able to fix some examples of *x*. This follows the method that Socrates typically uses, and is a re-affirmation of the case-based and particularist mode of reasoning which, as we saw in Chapter 6, Mīmāṃsakas like Śabara do much to promote. There is, however, at least one good reason for sharing Socrates' suspicion of agreed examples as providing starting points: namely, that although we *agree* about the extension of a term, we might both be wrong. Sometimes, indeed, in the course of inquiry, we can even come to discover our error. If a pre-requisite to inquiry is agreement on the extension of terms, how will we explain our ability to return to our original examples, once we have an outcome, and to revise or reject them? What this shows is that the original agreement was at best provisional; however, it leaves unexplained how such a provisional agreement can actually guide the inquiry to completion. So Śabara's solution allows only provisional inquiry and results.

A commentator on Śabara, Kumārila (*c.* 660 CE), provides the following re-statement of the paradox:

> It is possible to know (*jñātum*) that which is perfectly well known (*prasiddha*), but being so known there is no desire [to know it, and inquiry is a desire to know]. On the other hand, that which is not

> perfectly well known, being impossible [to desire to know], is all the more not [a possible object of a desire to know]. That is what is said.[7]

Here, the connection between inquiry and desire is made more explicit. Actually possessing the knowledge deprives the would-be inquirer of a capacity to desire knowledge, but desire uninformed with knowledge of what one desires is impossible. So we have a general principle about desire:

> [D] S can desire φ only if S knows that she lacks φ.

Inquiry is desire for knowledge. So we substitute 'knowledge of A' for 'φ':

> [DK] S can desire knowledge of A only if S knows that she lacks knowledge of A.

If S does have knowledge of A, then she does not lack it, in which case it will not be true that she knows that she lacks it, and so cannot desire it. But if S lacks knowledge of A, then the thought seems to be she will not be in a position to know that she lacks knowledge of A. So the epistemic principle to which the argument is implicitly committed is that ignorance is not transparent: $\neg KA \rightarrow \neg K(\neg KA)$. This principle states (in contraposed form) that one knows one is ignorant of A only if one knows A. So if one knows that one is ignorant of A then one both knows A and does not know A. Therefore, one does not know one's own ignorance.[8]

Kumārila's answer is to deny that ignorance is opaque. You are not blind to your own ignorance so long as you have competing truth-claims to arbitrate between. Regarding your moral duty (*dharma*), you have already the competing interpretations of the truth established by the Vedas. To make the case, Kumārila first distinguishes the metaphysical question as to the nature (*rūpa*) of duty from the epistemological question about our ways of knowing (*pramāṇa*) about duty, and points out that Śabara's previous

[7] prasiddhaḥ śakyate jñātuṃ prasiddhatvāt tu neṣyate | aprasiddhas tv aśakyatvān natarām ityato 'bruvīt || 124 ||. (Kumārila, *Ślokavārttika* 57, 1–2)

[8] Setting this out explicitly:

[1] $\neg KA \rightarrow \neg K(\neg KA)$ Opacity of Ignorance.

[2] $K(\neg KA) \rightarrow KA$, by contraposition.

[3] $K(\neg KA) \rightarrow \neg KA$, by the factivity of K.

[4] $K(\neg KA) \rightarrow KA \,\&\, \neg KA$, from 2, 3 and &-Introduction.

[5] $\neg K(\neg KA)$, by reductio.

discussion has established that it is the Vedas which give us knowledge of duty (v.126). There is, however, no agreement even among learned people with respect to the meaning of Vedic assertions. There is doubt and uncertainty, some saying that the meaning is one thing, others something else. That is why there is room for inquiry and a need for this text (vv. 127–8).[9] Thus, to inquire into morality is to search for the correct interpretation of the Vedas. Although it is agreed *that* the Vedas tell us what duty is, there is no agreement over *what* they tell us it is. Kumārila's solution would seem to involve an appeal to contextual definition: the meaning of the term 'moral duty' ('*dharma*') is fixed by the contexts of its use in a range of authoritative texts, the import of which is not obvious.

That solution, as it stands, will not generalise beyond its specific application, since the Vedas are not authoritative with respect to every disputed concept, but the approach could be generalised. For we might say that whenever you want to inquire into something, you have to find out what the word for that thing means, and in order to find this what you have to do is see how it is used in common language, or in whatever set of uses you take to be authoritative. In other words, one might try to argue that there is always information encoded in linguistic practice, and that is why it is not in general correct to say that you are ignorant about your ignorance. The selection and interpretation of authority then becomes the tendentious issue, and absorbs the force of the paradox: how do you know which contexts, examples, and cases to acknowledge as authoritative, central, and definitive with respect to something unless you already *know* the thing in question?

Kumārila's comment is important because it brings to the surface the problem with the 'pre-existing beliefs' strategy in addressing the paradox. At least on certain versions, this route to resolution simply *relocates* the problem. We cannot so easily avoid the apparent need to have pre-existing knowledge *of the answer to the very question into which one is supposed to be inquiring.*

We can put this another way: one might suspect that there is something rightly called 'having knowledge of a question' – precisely in the sense of knowing what will count as an answer – and that this is different from

[9] svarūpādiṣu dharmasya dvividhā vipratipadyate | pūrvaṃ pramāṇarūpābhyāṃ pādenādyasya nirṇayaḥ || 126 || sthite vedapramāṇatve punar vākyārthanirṇaye | matir bahuvidāṃ puṃsāṃ saṃśayān nopajāyate || 127 || kecid āhur asāv arthaḥ, kecin nāsāv ayaṃ tv iti | tannirṇayārtham apy etat paraṃ śāstraṃ praṇīyate || 128 || (*Ślokavārttika* 57,5–58,4).

knowing the answer. But it is just this presumption that the paradox of inquiry ultimately targets, and forces us to try to articulate more clearly: can there be 'knowing what will count as an answer' that is not already 'knowing the answer'? As Meno asks, 'If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?'

The Challenge Reformulated in Śaṅkara

Śaṅkara (or Śaṅkarācārya) is a prominent figure in Indian intellectual history, giving distinctive shape and new life to Hinduism in the eighth century CE. He raises the paradox of inquiry in his commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra*, a text declaring itself to be an inquiry into the foundational principle (*brahman*) underwriting the order of the cosmos. In his discussion, Śaṅkara clearly borrows from both Śabara and Kumārila in his way of phrasing the paradox and understanding that there must be some prior belief, but develops from them in finding new potential sources of information about the target of inquiry. *Brahma-sūtra* 1.1.1 begins in the conventional way: 'Now, consequently, [begins] an inquiry into *brahman*.'[10] Śaṅkara immediately goes on to ask, à la Śabara:

> It must, however, either be perfectly well known (*prasiddha*) what *brahman* is, or else not so known (*aprasiddha*). If it is perfectly well known, then there shall be no 'desire to know'; but if not so known, then it is impossible to inquire [into it].[11]

Śaṅkara's formulation explicitly captures an asymmetry which often features in the paradox: inquiry from a position of knowledge is simply *not to be done*, whereas inquiry from a position of ignorance is *impossible*. Śabara had hinted at the contrast; he said that while it is not possible to inquire into what one does know, he says it is *even more* impossible (*natarām*) to inquire into what one does not know. Socrates may also show a similar sensitivity to the difference between the two halves of the paradox: on his

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[10] It is Śaṅkara's view that an inquiry into *brahman* has four prerequisites, which consist in the possession of intellectual virtues of discrimination, equanimity, detachment from ordinary pleasures, and desire for liberation. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, thinks that a study of Vedic ritual and Mīmāṃsā is the prerequisite.

[11] tatpunar brahma prasiddham aprasiddhaṃ vā syāt | yadi prasiddhaṃ, na jijñāsitavyam | athāprasiddhaṃ, naiva śakyaṃ jijñāsitum iti | (Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 78,1–79,2 [*inf.* 1.1.1])

formulation if you know, "there is no need (οὐδὲν δεῖ, 80e4) to inquire" and this explains why there is no inquiry; whereas if you are ignorant, there simply is no inquiry, full stop. This difference in the nature of the impossibility in the two arms of the dilemma may indicate a real difference between the two problems. The contrast is made even more explicitly by an eleventh-century Buddhist author, Ratnakīrti, in connection with an inquiry into the existence of other minds. He comments that, if other minds are already known, then an attempt to demonstrate their existence is quite pointless, but if they are not, then no such demonstration is capable even of getting off the ground.[12]

If there is any real difference in the difficulties for inquiry between starting from a position of ignorance and starting from a position of knowledge, the latter might be thought to be slightly weaker – for at least starting from knowledge, one has *something* to go on, even if it is rather too much. The thought might be that, having full knowledge, I still *might* inquire if I desired to do so; but I do not inquire as it would in fact not be desired.[13]

Consider, though, what such an activity would look like. Suppose I had complete knowledge of *x*, and I nevertheless decided to go through the activity of 'searching for knowledge' of *x*. Would this actually be *inquiry*? Suppose I go through all the motions of inquiring – and might even have good reason to do so – but I know already everything that the inquiry will turn up. In that case, it seems, I am not investigating or inquiring at all; for, as is frequently pointed out, having an aim, namely knowledge (or at least cognitive improvement), is essential to being an inquiry. If my epistemic situation is already optimal, then it is incoherent to set as my aim an improvement in it; for, in general, if some purported 'aim' is already achieved, then it is not an *aim* at all.[14] Acting as if seeking an end one has already achieved could perhaps have the appearance of inquiry, but such an activity would only actually be mere 'as if' inquiry. The attempt

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[12] See Ratnakīrti, *Santānāntaradūṣaṇa* 147–49.

[13] The claim might be (1) that as a matter of convention, one does not normally conduct inquiries into what one knows, just as, as a matter of convention, one does not normally bathe when one is clean; or (2) that as a matter of psychological fact, when one thinks one knows, one *does not* inquire.

[14] What holds for desire (for knowledge) holds also for intention (to seek it). Compare Donald Davidson: 'Donnellan explains that intentions are connected with expectations and that you cannot intend to accomplish something by a certain means unless you believe

genuinely to engage in inquiry from a position of full knowledge would be what J. L. Austin has called a 'performative misfire'.

The asymmetry of expression between the two horns of the dilemma may then be something more than mere rhetorical flourish. For it captures the fact that the knower might give the appearance of inquiring, whereas the ignorant person could not even do that. Reflecting on *why* inquiry from the position of knowledge is 'not to be done' – now not because it is unconventional or psychologically impossible, but because it is conceptually incoherent – reveals something of the structure that is at work giving rise to the dilemma. If inquiry is not to be merely the false appearance of inquiry, there must be a gap between my cognitive state before I begin inquiry and my cognitive state after I have finished. *Real* inquiry consists in setting out to fill a *real* epistemic gap. Śaṅkara is aware of this demand: anyone who wants to preserve the possibility of inquiry must also preserve the possibility of a certain distance between two cognitive states, as well as the possibility of bridging that distance, or moving methodically from the one to the other.

In a detailed response to the paradox, Śaṅkara's first move is similar to moves made by Śabara: inquiry gets off the ground by appeal to information already available to me. Rather than appeal to the Vedas, however, Śaṅkara takes the more promising route of grounding these initial conceptions in linguistic, and in particular etymological, analysis. If names are given to things for reasons, I can examine the etymological roots and semantic origins of the name of the object I seek, and thereby learn core features of that object, those that are implicit in the very semantic content of the word. In the present case, the object of inquiry is *brahman*:

> We reply that *brahman* is [partly known] – his very nature (essence; *svabhāva*) is said to consist in what is eternal, pure and consciousness; bound up with the omniscient and the omnipotent. For the meanings such as 'being eternal' and 'being pure' are derived from semantic analysis of the word 'brahman', these meanings following from the verbal root 'bṛh'.[15]

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or expect that the means will, or at least could, lead to the desired outcome.' "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', in *Truth, Language and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 89–108, at p. 97.

[15] ucyate – asti tāvad brahma nityaśuddhabuddham uktasvabhāvaṃ sarvajñaṃ sarvaśaktisamanvitam । brahmaśabdasya hi vyutpādyamānasya nityaśuddhatvādayo 'rthāḥ pratīyante । bṛhater dhātor arthānugamāt । (*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 79,2–81,1).

The idea here has a sound pedigree in Indian philosophical semantics. To many Indian grammarians, it has seemed that an analysis of the grammatical derivation of a word, especially a noun, can be informative. In particular, such analysis (known as *vyutpatti* or *nirvacana*) can result in an explanation of the reasons why this name is used for this object.[16] The claim, for example, that *dharma* is 'that which upholds' is based on a conjecture about the verbal root from which the term ' *dharma*' is derived. Likewise here: Śaṅkara conjectures that the term '*brahman*' is derived from the verbal root *bṛh* -, 'to grow', and this enables him to conclude that *brahman* is so-called because it is in some way (maximally) great. The method assumes that there is some reason why objects bear the names they do, that it is not a matter merely of arbitrary stipulation (recall Quine's famous example: '"Giorgione" is so-called because of his size.'). The use of etymological analysis to derive semantic content, we might observe, therefore itself contains an appeal to the expertise of authority – the baptismal expertise of whosoever it was that selected this name as an appropriate one for this object, and the etymological expertise of whosoever it is now who makes conjectures about the derivation of the term. The division of linguistic labour thus enables even an ordinary language user to come to know something about the referent.

Here then is a potential source for the first necessary component for inquiry: an initial conception, a partial specification of the object sought. *What brahman* would be, if there were such a thing, is established; *that* there is any such entity remains uncertain, as does its more specific properties. This is the gap to be bridged by inquiry. This is what you inquire into.

Śaṅkara's second step is to point to something in the world you *do* know to exist. You know it by direct acquaintance:

> For every one knows of the existence of his own self, and does not think 'I am not'. If the existence of one's own self were not perfectly well known, any one of us could think 'I am not'. [17]

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[16] For discussion of the Indian tradition of semantic analysis (the *nirvacana* tradition), see Eivind Kahrs, *Indian Semantic Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For a treatment of Plato's discussion of the same practice, see David Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[17] sarvasyātmatvāc ca brahmāstitvaprasiddhaḥ | sarvo hy ātmāstitvaṃ pratyeti, na nāham asmīti | yadi hi nātmāstitvaprasiddhaḥ syāt, sarvo loko nāham asmīti pratīyāt | (*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 81,1–2).

The resonance in this passage of the *cogito* is striking, but is not relevant to the present discussion. That one has a self is something you cannot doubt. This can operate as an additional non-empty starting point for inquiry. It is not clear whether the weight of the argument should rest on the *indubitability* of the self, or simply on the fact of our *acquaintance* with it. It is also not clear whether sheer direct acquaintance suffices for indubitability, and so it is hard to tell whether Śaṅkara takes himself to be offering a solution to the problem of inquiry that can generalise, or whether he thinks there is something very special about his current topic of inquiry.[18]

In this case at least, and perhaps in many possible cases, there is something you can know by description: whatever truths follow from my use of the name ‘ *X*’. There is also something you know by acquaintance, something which does not, as you are acquainted with it, fit the description. So what you need – thirdly – is a way of linking these two objects of knowledge. In the present case: ‘And this self is *brahman*.’[19]

Crucially, you do not already know this identity. After all, as Śaṅkara now has the opponent say, ‘If the identity between self and *brahman* were perfectly well known among people, then being already known the consequence would be that there is no room for inquiry.’[20] Your ignorance that what you are already familiar with under a certain description is the same thing as something you know only by acquaintance is the gap which makes room for inquiry.[21] Inquiry can therefore be a real movement from less to greater knowledge in its ability to deliver *a posteriori* identities. Surveying the various possibilities on offer, Śaṅkara says:

> [T]here is disagreement with regard to its [self's] special nature. Common folk and materialists think that the self is the mere body in possession of consciousness. Some think that it is the conscious sense faculties; others, that it is the internal faculty (*manas*). Some

[18] In fact, Śaṅkara's monism permits him the thesis that there is only one object of inquiry, namely *brahman*. Vedāntadeśika, however, wonders if there can be inquiry into a single, undifferentiated, reality; S. M. Srinivasa Chari, *Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita*, 4th edn (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), pp. 94–5.

[19] ātmā ca brahma | (*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 81,1).

[20] yadi tarhi loke brahmātmatvena prasiddham asti, tato jñātam evety ajijñāsyatvaṃ punar āpannam | (*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 81,3).

[21] As John Perry has pointed out, the pronoun ‘I’ is, in his phrase, ‘essentially indexical’, that is to say irreducible to any non-indexical expression. ‘The problem of the essential indexical’, *Nous* 13/1 (1979), pp. 3–21.

> [Buddhists] think that it is the momentary [flow of] mere cognition; other [Buddhists], that it is empty (*śūnya*). Some people [the Nyāya] think that there is an agentive and experiencing transmigratory entity distinct from the body; others [the Sāṃkhya] that it is an experiencing thing but not agentive; others again [the Yoga] that, distinct from that, there is an omniscient and all-powerful God-soul. Still others [Vedāntins like Śaṅkara himself] think that this [God-soul] just is the self of the experiencer. [22]

The business of inquiry is to test these different ways of describing the self until you find the true one.[23] So again, inquiry is arbitrating between competing views (as in Śabara and Kumārila), with some recognition of an end to be matched up with experience. Thus you do not start with a mental blank slate when you embark on inquiry; but neither do you already know the thing you are seeking.

The solution, of course, does rely on our supposition of substantial claims about the role of language in providing us with initial access to, perhaps even the essence or core definition of, the object of inquiry. And we might find this claim optimistic. But let us accept the method of etymological analysis for the moment as offering an adequate starting point – for Śaṅkara's solution suffers a deeper difficulty.

Śaṅkara seems committed to the notion that etymological analysis gives us a description of the object of inquiry, while acquaintance gives us the fact of its existence. Inquiry is a process of learning that 'this' before me is 'that' which I knew fully by description. But how did I come to link 'this' with 'that'? Did I just chance upon the identity, or was there something about 'this' that indicated it is 'that'? The former is mere blundering about, not inquiry at all; the latter, however, reduces 'inquiry' to the one-step process of attending properly to what 'this' is. But handing over *in the first move* the identification between 'this' and 'that' is fatal to the possibility

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[22] tatviśeṣaṃ prati vipratipatteḥ । dehamātraṃ caitanyaviśiṣṭam ātmeti prākṛtā janā lokāyatikāś ca pratipannāḥ । indriyāṇy eva cetanāny ātmety apare । mana ity anye । vijñānamātraṃ kṣaṇikam ity eke । śūnyam ity apare । asti dehādivyatiriktaḥ saṃsārī kartā bhoktety apare । bhoktaiva kevalaṃ na kartety eke । asti tadvyatirikta īśvaraḥ sarvajñaḥ sarvaśaktir iti kecit । ātmā sa bhoktur ity apare । (*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 81,1–82,3).

[23] The suggestion of a progression from worldly to refined theories of selfhood may remind one of Prajāpati's graded instruction to Indra in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7–12.

of moving from one cognitive position to another, since in Śaṅkara's view this was all there is left to learn.

Nevertheless, the view is so close to having all the necessary pieces in place that one might be tempted to try another solution in the same vein. Suppose that our initial specification, however obtained, is incomplete. It tells us something, but not everything, about our object. It might then be informative about *how* to find an actual instance, where to look, without giving everything away at once. And even if you were then simply handed the fact that 'this is that', or stumbled upon the object in the world that meets the description, you could look to the *object*, rather than mere language (which perhaps has been exhausted), to learn further things about the object of inquiry. Knowing merely that *brahman* ('eternal pure consciousness') is self would still leave room for an inquiry into the nature of self, and so of *brahman*.

Such a solution preserves the basic structure of Śaṅkara's, but gains greater flexibility by introducing the notion of an incomplete description, or incomplete specification of the object of inquiry. An incomplete description can indicate features of the object useful for discovering an instance and still leave something to be discovered, once one has become acquainted with the object of interest.

As we are about to see, the brilliant critic Śrīharṣa will demonstrate that relying on anything so nebulous as an 'incomplete specification' is itself going to make a nonsense of inquiry. The voice of dissent is not so easily silenced.

9

Can One *Seek* to Answer Any Question? Śrīharṣa

On Questioning: The Pragmatics of Interrogative Dialogue

The Indian sceptic Śrīharṣa (*c.* 1100 CE) argues extensively for the impossibility of meaningfully asking a question. His claim is that there is an internal incoherence in the very logic of rational inquiry. The very idea of 'taking aim' at an object of thought incompletely conceived is, he argues, paradoxical. One can distinguish two strands in his argument: a strand having to do with the pragmatics of asking questions and giving answers, and a second strand to do with prior epistemic commitment.[1]

The first strand presents an entirely new context for thinking about paradoxes of inquiry: the pragmatics of interrogative dialogue. Śrīharṣa lays down a dialogical principle that seems unobjectionable:

> Whatever may be the topic of the question, that designated thing is the one which must [also] be what is spoken about in reply.[2]

[1] The editor of the Sanskrit text divides the text of chapter 3 into eight paragraphs. In the first two paragraphs, Śrīharṣa distinguishes four possible meaning of the word *kim* 'what?', the last of which is interrogative. What we are discussing now is the argument in paragraphs 3–5, that it is impossible on dialogical grounds to use *kim* to ask a question. Paragraphs 6–8 press a second argument, that the prior knowledge needed to ground inquiry itself makes inquiry impossible.

[2] This is one of a pair of rules Śrīharṣa quotes as *ślokas* from earlier, unidentified, sources; the other is introduced below as I′. The principle is first appealed to on page 555, but only stated in this complete form later. The Sanskrit for both principles is: atra

The rules of conversation, as they bear upon question–answer discussions, dictate that a respondent must make his answer 'speak to' the question, and, in particular, that it must 'speak of' the very same things being asked about.[3]

This principle might seem a fair and necessary point of dialogical hygiene; questions must be addressed in the terms in which they are put: no changing the subject, and no trading on an equivocation, is permitted in a reply that counts as answering the question. What a question is about (that is, the 'topic' of the question) is a function of what the speaker has in mind to ask after, and there must be coordination between the 'speaker meaning' of the questioner and the 'speaker meaning' of the respondent. The respondent must recognise, and show in his response that he has recognised, what it is that the speaker is speaking of.

However, Śrīharṣa treats this principle as if it is merely another way of putting the following, stronger principle:

> I′. In whatever way the inquirer speaks of the topic of his own question, it is to be spoken of, in the light of that statement, in exactly the same way by the respondent in his reply.[4]

Although drawing on a similar feature of question-and-answer discussion, [I′] is not the same as [I]. It is, in fact, an extremely strict interpretation of what is required to satisfy the demands of [I]. For according to [I′], not only must the referent be the same in question and in answer, but the very way in which the object of inquiry is spoken of must be the same, in the question and in the answer.

But if answers can only employ terms used in the original question, and used in the way they are used in the original question, then how can the respondent introduce new information? As Śrīharṣa observes, he cannot: there will be no room at all for sliding away from, or adding anything further to, the information already supplied in the question.

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ca saṅgrahaślokau "yathāvidhaṃ yaṃ viṣayaṃ nijasya praśnasya nirvakti paro yathoktyā | vācyas tathaivottaravādināpi tathaiva vācā sa tathāvidho 'rthaḥ | praśnasya yaḥ syād viṣayaḥ sa vācyo vācānayaivaiṣa bhaven niruktaḥ | idaṃ tvayāpyāsthitam etayaiva girā svapṛcchā viṣayasya vaktrā" || (Śrīharṣa, *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* 557,7–10).

[3] One might recall Grice's 'conversational maxims', in particular, the maxim of Relation; H. P. Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', in *Syntax and Semantics,* vol. 3, eds Peter Cole and Jerry Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 41–58.

[4] See above, footnote 2, for Sanskrit text.

From the agreement that responses must meet the question posed on its own terms, Śrīharṣa tries to argue that it is impossible for an answer rightly to go beyond what is already contained in the question (or, conversely, for a question to be about anything beyond what is already contained in the question). Thus the very nature of inquiry is incoherent, because it presents itself as reaching beyond itself in a way that no thought or statement could.[5]

For example, suppose I want to know something further about *x* – so, in Śrīharṣa's example, I have God in mind, but want to know something about God, namely, a proof for His existence.

> If the significance of the word 'what?' is to question, there is an object in mind about which there is a desire for knowledge; and here, because the word 'proof' is being used, the desire concerns a proof. [The rule is that] exactly that thing which the question has as its topic (*viṣaya*) should be spoken about (*adhidheya*) by the respondent. In this question [asking whether there is a proof for] the existence of God, is [the existence of] proof in general, or a particular proof, meant to be the topic? If the first, then the answer 'With regard to the existence of God, [there is] proof!' ought indeed be returned. For [the rule is that] exactly that thing which the question has as its topic should be spoken about; the question has proof as a general topic, and that is just what is spoken of by the word 'proof'. But in the second case also, the reply 'With regard to the existence of God, proof!' ought to come

[5] Compare G. E. R. Lloyd's worry, in the context of learning from other cultures, that 'We may be at a loss to explain, in general terms, how such learning can occur, how new insights into underlying ontological questions can be gained. It may seem that it cannot happen, as if either other ideas will be reduced to our own, or they will remain forever unintelligible'. *Ancient Worlds, Modern Reflections: Philosophical Perspectives on Greek and Chinese Science and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 9. Lloyd replies that 1) we do in fact learn in such circumstances, and 2) there is no difference between such learning circumstances and what we might think of as the usual ones children find themselves in. But neither reply seems very satisfactory: the first simply reiterates the paradox to be explained; the second makes all such learning haphazard – young children, we might think, to a large extent just assimilate whatever is 'around'; their learning is not targeted. But such undirected activity is not inquiry at all. Śrīharṣa's final tongue-in-cheek invitation to his interlocutor to become his devotee seems to be recognizing this very point.

> back as well. [For] just as the word 'proof' is used in the question to refer to a particular [proof], so too [can it be used] in the response.[6]

To the question, 'Is there a proof of the existence of God?' the appropriate reply is 'Yes, that object to which you refer with the phrase 'proof of the existence of God' is (as you yourself well know) a proof of the existence of God.' According to the dialogical principle [I], the object of the question and the object of the answer must be the same. Strictly interpreted, as in [I′], this yields the result that only the very information already contained in the question could be included in the answer. Thus, whatever the questioner asks after, she necessarily already has the answer to her question, since the only legitimate way to fix the referent as the same is to use the very same words, in the same way.

Obviously, this is quick and tidy work for the inquiry-sceptic, if it works. Just as obviously, it does not work. For nothing warrants substituting [I′] for [I] – surely securing sameness of referent in question and answer does not require anything so strong as [I′].

However, it may well be that something stronger than [I] is required, so that Śrīharṣa is not being wanton in introducing [I′]. It has been argued by Richard Heck, for example, that testimony imposes a constraint on speakers which is stronger than [I]. He writes, 'It is because communication must enable the transfer of knowledge that more than reference must be common to the cognitive values different speakers attach to a given name.'[7] He claims that this leads to a Fregean view about what is required for communication. Heck points out that there is a 'strict' interpretation of what Frege's view demands – an interpretation which makes his view committed to something very like Śrīharṣa's strong principle [I′]; but, he observes that while 'On the strictest such view, one must think of the object in the same way as the speaker . . . note that, even on this strict view, one need not entertain any thoughts about how the speaker herself thinks

[6] praśnārthāt khalu kiṃśabdāt kasyacit padārthasya jijñāsyamānatā pratīyate, sā ceha pramāṇapadasamabhivyāhārāt pramāṇaviṣayiṇī pratīyate. yadviṣayaś ca praśnas taduttaravādinābhidheyaṃ tad ayaṃ praśna īśvarasadbhāve pramāṇasāmānyaviṣayas tadviśeṣavisṣayo vābhipretaḥ ? ādyaś ced īśvarasadbhāve pramāṇam ityevottaram āpadyeta, yadviṣayo hi praśnas tadabhidheyam, pramāṇasāmānyaviṣayaś ca praśnaḥ tac ca pramāṇaśabdenābhihitam eva | atha dvitīyaḥ tathāpīśvarasadbhāve pramāṇam ityevottaram āpadyeta | yathā praśnavākye pramāṇaśabdo viśeṣaparaḥ tathottaravākye || (*Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* 555, 6–11).

[7] R. G. Heck Jr., 'The Sense of Communication', *Mind*, 104 (1995), pp. 79–106, at p. 94.

of the object. Nor will one need to do so on views which explain 'an appropriate fashion' in weaker, more plausible terms'. One may grant that what Śrīharṣa might have legitimately been after in [I′] was the insistence that there be an 'appropriate fashion' in which one must think of the object to which the speaker is referring which is such as to allow for the possibility of testimony. This would be something not as strong as sameness of sense (Śrīharṣa's Principle I′) but stronger than sameness of reference (Śrīharṣa's Principle I).

But Śrīharṣa himself recognises the illegitimacy of insisting upon [I′]. He introduces an objector, who makes the obvious rejoinder, with all the indignation that any reader of Śrīharṣa's first anti-inquiry argument might feel:

> The question means 'What is the particular specific proof [of the existence of God]?'; and the proper answer is to mention some particular proof, and it not consist in the sort of incoherent prattle (*pralāpa*) you engage in.[8]

Even Śrīharṣa could not believe his luck in stumbling so immediately into a proof of the impossibility of inquiry. He will have to work harder for his desired conclusion, and the only lesson to be carried over from this first attempt is that successful communication between questioner and respondent requires at least as much as is needed to secure sameness of reference – and perhaps something more.

The Prior Knowledge Argument

Śrīharṣa takes these points about making identifying reference within dialogue and applies them to the analysis of inquiry in terms of 'desire for knowledge.' Noting that an inquiry is a desire for knowledge, he reminds us that desire is impossible with respect to the unknown or 'unapprehended' (*ajñāta*): 'From a question or an interrogative what is understood is that something is the subject-matter of an inquiry. Inquiry is a desire

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[8] kāsādhāraṇī pramāṇa-vyaktir iti praśnārthaḥ, tatra tādṛśyāḥ pramāṇa-vyakter abhidhānam uttaraṃ yuktaṃ naivaṃvidhāḥ pralāpāḥ | (*Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* 556, 10–12).

to know, but a desire cannot be for what is unknown, on pain of absurd results.'[9]

We should distinguish here between desire proper, which has an object or target, and more general feelings of longing – between, say, a desire for chocolate and a general feeling of hunger. Inquiry rests on the former, not the latter. Inquiry is a desire for knowledge, directed towards some specific region of epistemic lack, not a more general longing for information, a wish to be better informed, as it were. Being a specific sort of desire, inquiry has an object – something or other that one desires to know.

Because inquiry is a desire to know something, the inquirer's present beliefs, Śrīharṣa now insists, whether they be true or false, must form the basis of their inquiry.[10] This is the only source for fixing the object of desire.[11] His new strategy in the argument against inquiry will be to show that the prior beliefs necessary to render inquiry possible also make it impossible. If the inquirer has beliefs about *x* which are true and complete, then they already have at their disposal any information *about x* that they might ask for. So the beliefs about *x* on which their inquiry is based must fall short of perfection, if there is to be inquiry at all. They can fall short in one of two ways; both of these, Śrīharṣa argues, fail to make inquiry possible.

First, the inquirer's beliefs might be false, in which case what they are asking about is not actually *x* at all. Śrīharṣa's example is an inquirer who has misperceived a shiny shell as a piece of silver, and then tries to ask something about the piece of silver. A question based on false prior beliefs cannot be answered, except with an answer that commits itself to the same error. Thus, Śrīharṣa:

> Some belief of one's own (*svajñāna*) is the ground (*kāraṇa*) of that desire [to know], and we have to ask whether perhaps its object is in accordance with the facts, or is not so in accordance (*yathābhūtārtha*).[12]

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[9] praśnārthāc ca kiṃśabdāj jijñāsāviṣayatā 'rthasya pratīyate | jijñāsā ca jñātum icchā, icchā cājjāte na sambhavati atiprasaṅgāt | (*Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* 557, 35–36).

[10] In paragraphs 7 and 8, Śrīharṣa considers and rejects two possible strategies for defending the possibility of inquiry without prior beliefs about the object of inquiry, one being that the question has a merely causal function, the other being that it is asked only for the sake of argument. Neither defence seems very promising.

[11] Compare Plato, *Philebus* 35a–c, where either perception or memory must put us in touch with an object, if we are to conceive a desire for it.

[12] Indicative: 'in accordance with the facts, the true state, truth, reality'.

> If it is in accordance with the facts, then that cognition alone will itself provide the proof as its object. This is because, in the matter of that object, it is impossible to speak of its being in accordance with the facts without it reaching (*pravṛtti*) the proof. . . . [On the other hand,] if the object of that belief is not in accordance with the facts, then if what you want from us is also to produce a false belief, why are you in need of someone else to do what you do yourself? You who are skilled in the production of false beliefs can produce more just as you have already generated some! We who never produce false beliefs but only true ones, how ought we be employed here?[13]

Second, the inquirer might have true but incomplete beliefs about *x*. The 'failure of accordance' might be a matter of less-than-maximal accordance, rather than one of maximal non-accordance. In that case, one strategy is to argue that their beliefs about *x* fail to pick out some definite object. To the extent that the beliefs about *x* are vague, unspecified, or simply incomplete, they will fail to identify *x* adequately, and so fail to be about an actual *x* at all. In both these cases, then, the basis of the inquiry or question fails to aim at any existing thing, and the inquirer is therefore asking about non-existents (or falsehoods).

Now here it is tempting to reply that you can get a grasp on the object of inquiry sufficient to ground a question about it, without knowing everything about the object already, and in fact even believing some false things about it. Even if you don't know the composition of the sun, even if, indeed, you mistakenly believe that the sun travels around the earth, you can nevertheless successfully refer to the sun (pick it out in thought and dialogue) *and distinguish it* from all other existing things in the world, so that you can inquire into it, or ask a question about it. You need only some

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[13] tatra svajñānam icchākāraṇībhūtaṃ vaktavyaṃ tadyathābhūtārthaṃ vā syād ayathābhūtārthaṃ vā ? yathābhūtārthaṃ cet tenaiva jñānena svakīyo viṣayaḥ pramāṇam upasthāpyate, viṣaye pramāṇapravṛttim antareṇa tadīyayathārthatvasya vaktum aśakyatvāt, [tenāpi pramāṇena svagocara īśvarasadbhāvaḥ upāsthāpyata ityanāyāsenaiva siddhosmākam īśvarasiddhim anorathaḥ |] athāyathārthaṃ tattasminn ayathārthajñānaviṣaye yadyasmābhir apy ayathārtham eva jñānam utpādanīyam iti bhavataḥ pṛcchato vāñchataṃ tadā keya svādhīne 'arthe parāpekṣā ? bhavānevāyathārtha jñānotpādanakuśalo yathaikaṃ tatra mithyājñānam ajījanat tathā 'param apy utpādayatu | vayaṃ punar yathārthajñānasyotpādayitāro mithyājñāne sarvathaivākṛtinaḥ kim iha niyujyemahi ? (*Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* 558,1–558,10).

characteristic mark of the object,[14] in virtue of which we all agree which item in the universe is under discussion.

Śrīharṣa's response is that if you have only an indeterminate notion of the object you are asking about, then it could only be that you are asking about an indeterminate object. To try to discover of some object, 'indeterminately-composed-sun', of what it is composed involves me in incoherence. Śrīharṣa:

> Perhaps what you ask is that we make your belief, the content of which fails [fully or partially] to accord, into one the content of which does [fully] accord? If this is what you want, it is indeed impossible for you to seek to achieve it, for to do so is contradictory. How can a rational person make an attempt with this aim: 'Let this shell which I think to be a piece of silver become the content of a true belief!'? For there is a contradiction between 'being the content of a non-accordant belief cognised under a certain mode' and 'being the content of an accordant belief cognised under that same mode'.[15]

Śrīharṣa seems to anticipate Moore's Paradox: I cannot both believe that I am thinking about a shell and think that this belief is false, and then will to form a true belief about it. If an indeterminate conception cannot give determinate shape and direction to the search, and since the object itself cannot draw the search to it as if it is a magnet, there is nothing to regulate the inquiry. The sort of inquiry that seems impossible to get off the ground is an inquiry into the identity conditions of something not yet determinately individuated. If you search for a place to have dinner in a foreign city with only the scantest of ideas about what sort of restaurant you are looking for, and eventually come across somewhere, you can hardly then say that *this* was the place you were looking for all along.[16]

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[14] 'To be able to specify some sign (σημεῖον) whereby that thing can be differentiated from everything else' as *Theaetetus* 208c has it. Socrates' objections to this possibility are similar to Śrīharṣa's.

[15] atha madīyasyāyathārthajñānasya yo viṣayaḥ sa madīyayathārthajñānaviṣayo bhavatā kriyatām iti ? tvadīyaṃ vāñchitaṃ tadā vyāghātādīdṛśyarthe bhavataḥ pravṛttir evānupapannā, śuktikā rajatātmatvena mama yathāthajñānaviṣayo bhavatvityetadarthaṃ prekṣāvān kathañkāraṃ prayateta ? yena rūpeṇāyathārthajñānaviṣayatvaṃ tena rupeṇa yathārthajñānaviṣayatve vyāghātāt || (*Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, 558,10–558,14).

[16] A desire, Śrīharṣa says, must have some object. But by definition, inquiry is for the unknown. Being unknown, it cannot be picked out as an object, and so cannot be an object of desire.

If Śrīharṣa's principle seems unduly stringent, consider again the non-dialogical situation. Whatever specification of my object you start with, that is the only thing you can end up with. If your initial notions of what you are looking for are imprecise, then you will find all manner of different things answering to it (or all manner of different possible answers) with no means of determining which was the thing you were actually after. But to the extent that your initial description is specific enough to constrict the field, to that same extent you already know my answer. And if that description is false, you are simply on a wild goose chase.

Against Aiming

The arguments of Śrīharṣa, I think, bring us very close to what is felt as paradoxical in the notion of inquiry. The paradox has to do, primarily, with the idea that in standard forms of inquiry the inquirer takes aim at an object.[17] The problem is that this 'object', insofar as it features in the mind, must be both determinate and indeterminate – determinate if it is to regulate the inquiry, but indeterminate if there is to be any scope for further knowledge acquisition. There is a discrepancy between the object as it is conceived and the object itself that one seeks. And this discrepancy is not a symptom of any inadequacy in our own cognitive powers, or of some lack of fit between mind and world; the discrepancy is part of the very logic of inquiry. Without such a gap, there is no progress to make and no inquiry possible. But the difference necessary for inquiry means that the object found *cannot be* the object sought.

This in turn means that appeal to an incomplete initial conception or specification cannot make inquiry possible. What you seek in any inquiry is *the unknown part or parts* of the object initially conceived. Inquiry is into the unknown. But initial specifications cannot help you with *that*, because the whole mystery lies in how these specifications could possibly point beyond themselves in any way more determinate than is already contained within them.

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[17] Gaṅgeśa, in his seminal post-Śrīharṣa work on epistemology, reaffirms the principle that inquiry requires a target. He says: 'A cognition (*jñāna*) of an object [to which contrary alternatives are attributed] is a necessary condition for doubt. Otherwise, there could be neither regulation by the object, in a doubt, nor the possibility of an imbalance [in epistemic weight] between the alternatives' (dharmijñānaṃ ca saṃśayahetuḥ | anyathā saṃśaye dharmi-niyamaḥ koṭyutkaṭatvañca na syāt). Gaṅgeśa, *Tattvacintāmaṇi* TC 199.

Inquiry wishes to occupy a middle ground – between a pure analysis of concepts on the one hand, and a simple receptiveness to the data on the other – but it seems that there is no such middle ground to be had. Inquiry might hope to have as its role the clarification of an initially vague or incomplete concept, but a clear answer to an unclear question is possible only at the cost of changing the subject.

What are the alternatives? One is, as Śrīharṣa himself suggests, a kind of epistemic humility: you put yourself at the disposal of a teacher or simply of the world and allow whatever knowledge there is 'out there' to come in. Another alternative is to believe that a state of confusion or ignorance, intransitively conceived, has within itself the capacity to come to clarity, without the one who is in that state trying to press the issue. False beliefs, left to themselves, simply dissolve. That is a form of epistemic quietism. But whether we choose humility or quietism, the lesson of the paradox of inquiry is that 'taking aim at knowledge', like chasing windmills, is a quixotic pursuit.

The Longing for Knowledge

One might observe that Śrīharṣa's arguments rely heavily on the conception of inquiry as targeted at a specific object. But perhaps this is not the right way to conceive of inquiry. Indeed, it is precisely the force of Śrīharṣa's arguments that may make us step back and consider just what inquiry is.

If sound, Śrīharṣa's arguments show that we cannot conceive of inquiry as the targeting of one's thirst for knowledge at some portion of the unknown. This then shifts the burden of proof onto someone who wanted to defend the idea that inquiry does, nevertheless, have a direction. The onus is on them to explain how that can be, given that the intuitive model – of targeting – is not one which is available. To say, simply, that inquiry is possible and must have a direction, is as much to miss the point as to respond to Zeno's paradoxes of motion by saying that motion *is* possible.

One plausible attempt would be to argue that in an inquiry what one wants to find is something falling under a concept of which one has a firm grasp, such as looking for something which falls under the concept 'a good but cheap restaurant in the near vicinity'. The criteria are clear, but the particulars satisfying them remain multiple and indeterminate. Here, it might be said, an indefinite description is sufficient to provide the inquiry with a general direction, without any particular being targeted. But we must notice that this answer presupposes that the inquirer already

has a clear grasp of the concept, and of what would count as something falling under it. The less clear the criteria of specification – if, for instance, I don't know the city, whether they have restaurants or where, which sorts of things will count as 'good' in the restaurant (atmosphere, taste, kind of food) – the more our seeking a good restaurant will look like wandering about the city than a directed search. And with that we are back to epistemic humility again.

The paradox of inquiry is most apparent, and most acute, when one is seeking knowledge of what it would be for something to fall under some given concept, which is why the paradox is so regularly formulated in the context of 'What is it?'-type questions. This is seen not only in Plato, but in the Indian sources as well – the paradox arose for Śabara and Kumārila in asking about *dharma,* 'What is it?'; for Śankara when asking about *brahman*, 'What is it?' Questions not explicitly so formulated might be able to be recast in such a form – for example, Śrīharṣa sets the question, 'Is there a proof for the existence of God?' which differs only superficially from the question about the proof of the existence of God, 'What is it?' If many or most questions guiding inquiry can be so re-formulated, this may show that the reach of the paradox is further than we might expect, that conceptual clarity is rather less than usually supposed.

The full force of the argument of Śrīharṣa is thus that the burden of proof lies with someone who wishes to maintain that inquiry in such cases can have a direction, when the apparently available models for providing such direction either lead to paradox or come into play too late. He thinks, rightly or wrongly, that the burden of proof is unanswerable, and that one must acknowledge instead that knowledge is something which cannot be sought out but only longed for.

The background motivation for engaging in this lengthy examination of Śrīharṣa's argument has been to demonstrate that critical dissent is as much an intrinsic part of Indian culture as more programmatic theorisation, and to see what such 'internal criticism' looks like, not in the abstract but in all its detail and specificity. With this study of Śrīharṣa I have now finished my survey of the astonishing variety of resources that comprise this self-questioning culture. I have described the ideal of public reason and the case-based model of reasoning in the *Nyāya-sūtra*, the mode of reasoning by adaptation and substitution from paradigms in the Ritual Sūtras, its development in the hands of Mīmāṃsa theoreticians, and the derivation of practical reason in the work of *dharma-śāstra* writers like Manu; I have explored the highly significant contribution of

Buddhist thinkers, from the author of the *Questions of Milinda* to the sophisticated theoretical framework of the *Elements of Dialogue*; and last, but by no means least, I have isolated a vital strand of dissent, represented in the oppositional voices (*pūrvapakṣas*) recorded in Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā treatises and even in the work of the celebrated Śaṅkara.

The larger claim I am making is that *all* these resources of reason are available in the fashioning of self-critical contemporary identities. So now, in order to understand how identity might be in this way a work of reason, I want to explore what this same civilisation has said about individual and cosmopolitan identity, and especially about the way the choices an individual makes manufacture the identities they have. For the purposes of this new exploration, I propose to draw on still other bodies of writing partly constitutive of intellectual India: namely the Upaniṣads, a body of metaphysical speculation within the Vedic corpus; the *Mahābhārata*, that great epic 'Kasus'; and the Buddhist Nikāya, the reported dialogues of the Buddha. For all these works too, in their infinite complexity, are resources available to the formation of contemporary identities. No simple or reductive reading of these texts should be allowed to diminish the exquisite richness and variety of the ideas they contain. Modern identities are, of course, fashioned in circumstances very different from those of the ancients; the point is to understand the stratagems and techniques of identity-formation, to modify and adapt them so as to render them suitable to our new historical circumstance.

10

On the Formation of Self

Spiritual Exercises and the Aesthetic Analogy

Of the many interrelated themes in Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy As a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*,[1] two strike me as having a particular centrality. First, there is the theme of attention to the present instant. Hadot describes this as the 'key to spiritual exercises' (p.84), and he finds the idea encapsulated in a quotation from Goethe's *Second Faust*: 'Only the present is our happiness' (p.217). The second theme is that of viewing the world from above: 'Philosophy signified the attempt to raise up mankind from individuality and particularity to universality and objectivity' (p.242). Insofar as both attention to the present and raising oneself to an objective view imply the mastery of individual anxiety, passion and desire, they belong to a single conception, that conception being one of a 'return to the self':

> Thus, all spiritual exercises are, fundamentally, a return to the self, in which the self is liberated from the state of alienation into which it has been plunged by worries, passions, and desires. The 'self' liberated in this way is no longer merely our egoistic, passionate individuality: it is our moral person, open to universality and objectivity, and participating in universal nature or thought. (p.103)

[1] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), translated by Michael Chase from the original *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1987).

Richard Sorabji[2] has questioned the extent to which it is true to say *generally* of the ancient philosophers that they found value only in the present, conceding the idea principally to Marcus Aurelius, an author to whom Hadot has given special attention.[3] Sorabji too, however, has spoken of what he terms the 'inwardness' of the ancient spiritual exercises, and he has pointed out that the idea of turning inward is more ancient than Augustine, who indeed says that he learned to look inward from the Platonists. For Hadot, the guiding metaphor seems to have been the one introduced by Plotinus, who likened the inward turn to the activity of a sculptor, chipping away at a block of marble in order to manifest the statue within. Thus *Ennead* 1.6.9:

> How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has? Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop 'working on your statue' till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see 'self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat'.[4]

Hadot makes the point that for Plotinus, a sculptor merely exposes something that pre-exists in the marble. This is the reason why he finds fault with the use to which Michel Foucault has put the ancient exercises, in Foucault's description of them as the 'cultivation of the self' through 'techniques'. Foucault, alleges Hadot, misunderstands the Plotinian metaphor as implying an exaggerated aestheticism, and even a Dandyism, according to which one fabricates a personality for oneself as if creating a work of art (pp. 102, 211). In an appraisal of the role of the aesthetic analogy in ancient ethics, Joseph Sen has pointed out that the Plotinian conception of the inward is based on a concept of subtraction: 'The ideal psychic state is not something to be newly made or created but is experienced with the

[2] Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 238–9.

[3] For example, *Marcus Aurelius, Meditations* 3.10: '[A]nd remember withal that it is only this present, a moment of time, that a man lives: all the rest either has been lived or may never be'. In *Marcus Aurelius*, trans. C. R. Haines (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1916).

[4] From the translation of A. H. Armstrong in the Loeb Classical Library edition (Cambridge, MA, 1966).

removal of those accretions which have hidden and thus prevented a realisation of the self which we already are.'[5]

For some ancient Indians, the thought that death occurs not just once but many times over within the span of a single human life provides not comfort but additional anxiety. If one is to be cured of the fear that an endless chain of 're-deaths' is our fate, one remedy is to learn to see one's true self as something indestructible. That thought motivates the spiritual exercises described in the Upaniṣads. These typically involve precisely that 'return to the self' of which Hadot speaks, encouraging us to turn our attention inwards in order to re-acquaint ourselves with a universal, impartial self that indwells each of us. A couple of verses from the Kaṭha Upaniṣad are enough to illustrate the point. Turning inward is the way to free oneself from sorrow and desire, to reach wisdom and even immortality:[6]

> Finer than the finest, larger than the largest,
> is the self that lies here hidden
> in the cave of a living being.
> Without desires and free from sorrow,
> a man perceives by the creator's grace
> the grandeur of the self. (*Kaṭha* 2.20)

> The Self-existent One pierced the apertures outward,
> therefore, one looks out, and not into oneself.
> A certain wise man in search of immortality,
> turned his sight inward and saw the self within. (*Kaṭha* 4.1)

Wilhelm Halbfass has observed that later philosophers in the Upaniṣadic system of Advaita Vedānta use the term *svāsthya* 'coinciding with oneself; being in one's own true, natural state' to refer to a soteriological goal involving the removal of obstacles that distance us from an appreciation of our underlying self: "Final release' (*mukti*) or 'isolation' (*kaivalya*) of the self is not to be produced or accomplished in a literal sense, but only in a figurative sense, just as the regaining of the natural state of health (*svāsthya*) through medical therapy is not the accomplishment or

[5] Joseph Sen, 'Good Times and the Timeless Good', *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 3 (1995), pp. 3–25, at p. 24.

[6] For other examples, see e.g. *Chāndogya* 6.1.1–7; 8.7.1–8.12.6

acquisition of something new, but only a return to a 'previous' state, a removal of disturbances and obstacles.'[7] The recovery of this natural state of the self is achieved by means of exercises whose function is to train one to regard apparent diversity as merely apparent, assenting to such appearances being regarded as a precondition for desire and other forms of emotional attachment. One way to accomplish this is to learn to 'withdraw' the senses, an idea whose most celebrated expression is found at *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.58, though the same metaphor is found in Buddhist and other Indian texts too:

> And when he draws in on every side his senses from their proper objects,
> As a tortoise its limbs, firm-stablished is the wisdom of such a man.

This idea of a 'return to the self' by way of a withdrawal of the senses has an echo in other of the spiritual exercises catalogued by Marcus Aurelius, who speaks of retreating to a 'daimon' within, as the Indians might to an 'ātman'.[8]

Philosophy as Medicine

Two philosophers of the fourth to fifth century CE refer to a model of the discipline of philosophy that has four divisions: an account of what is sought to be removed or eliminated (*heya*, lit. 'what ought to be abandoned'); an account of its aetiology (*heya-hetu*, lit. 'that which produces *heya*'); an account of the state or condition achieved subsequent to this elimination (*hāna*; lit. 'abandonment'); and, finally, an account of the method to be employed to bring this condition about (*hāna-upāya*; lit. 'the means leading to *hāna*'). Their model of philosophical practice generalises and abstracts from two earlier fourfold accounts of practical disciplines. One is the soteriology made famous by the Buddha as the 'four noble

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[7] Wilhelm Halbfass, 'The Therapeutic Paradigm and the Search for Identity in Indian Philosophy,' in his *Traditions and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 251.

[8] *Meditations* 6.6: 'But if there appears nothing better than the very deity (*daimon*) enthroned in thee, which has brought into subjection to itself all individual desires, which scrutinizes the thoughts, and, in the words of Socrates, has withdrawn itself from all the enticements of the senses . . .'; compare 3.12, 3.16, and also 4.3: 'From now therefore bethink thee of the retreat into this little plot that is thyself'.

truths', consisting in accounts of suffering (*duḥkha*), the causes of suffering (*samudaya*), liberation from suffering (*nirodha*) and the path from suffering to liberation (*mārga*) in the shape of eight sorts of 'right understanding'. The other is a model of medicine found in the treatises of the physicians, according to which there is an account of disease (*roga*), the causes of disease (*roga-hetu*), health or 'freedom from disease' (*ārogya*), and the treatment of disease (*bhaiṣajya*).[9] One of the philosophers who advance the model is the author of the *Yoga-sūtra*, Patañjali. Thus:

> What is to be abandoned is future suffering. What produces this is the self's contact with the perceived . . . the cause [in turn] of that is lack of knowledge. The state achieved by abandoning this is the isolation of the self; it consists in the non-presence of the self's contact [with the perceived] and follows when there is no lack of knowledge. The method to be employed is the persistent discrimination [between *buddhi* and *puruṣa*].[10]

So the spiritual exercise here is a practice of discrimination which leads to a 'return to the self' in the form of the self's isolation from the perceptual world. Patañjali goes on to add that this practice of discrimination is supported by such things as postures (*āsana*), breathing control (*prāṇāyāma*), holding the mind steady (*dhāraṇā*), meditation (*dhyāna*, *samādhi*), ethical restraint (*yama*) and religious observance (*niyama*).[11]

The other philosopher to promote the model is Vātsyāyana, author of a commentary on the *Nyāya-sūtra*, the foundational text of perhaps the most theoretical of the Indian philosophical schools. In his commentary on the first sūtra, he says:

> The highest good is reached by means of knowledge of such knowables as the self, as will be explained in the next sūtra. One reaches the highest good, indeed, by rightly understanding the four *arthapadas*,

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[9] For references: Albert Wezler, 'On the Quadruple Division of the Yogaśāstra, the *caturvyūhatva* of the Cikitsāśāstra and the "Four Noble Truths" of the Buddha', *Indologica Taurinensia* 12 (1984), pp. 289–337.

[10] *Yoga-sūtra* 2.1.16–17, 24–26. *Yoga-sūtra*, ed. Dhundhiraja Shastri (Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series, 1930).

[11] *Yoga-sūtra* 2.1.29. Just as the modern idea of what it is to be stoical is comparatively impoverished, so similarly is the contemporary understanding of what is involved in the practice of yoga.

> namely what ought to be abandoned, that which produces it, its complete abandonment, [which is] the final goal, and the method for bringing that about.[12]

Vātsyāyana will go on to stress that the ideas of the highest good and the knowledge that leads to it are subject-specific; thus, while the highest good in medicine is health, the highest good in the 'science of the self' (*ātmavidyā*) is liberation (*apavarga*). The next sūtra is then read as identifying what ought to be abandoned as suffering (*duḥkha*), its cause as erroneous beliefs (*mithyājñāna*), the condition of the abandonment of suffering as liberation (*apavarga*), and the method as acquiring knowledge, including knowledge of the self (*ātmajñāna*). He explains that erroneous beliefs produce in us lusts (*rāga*) and revulsions (*dveṣa*), which lead first to greed (*lobha*) and then to acts of harm (*hiṃsā*), stealing, and sexual indiscretion.[13] It is ironic, in view of the similarity of this scheme with the four noble truths of the Buddha, that the mistake about the self identified here is the error of thinking that it does not exist; this is a theme I will return to in Chapter 13. The knowledge that is the antidote to such errors is knowledge of the 'real nature' (*tattva*) of the entity in question. Vātsyāyana concludes by noting that the condition of being without pain and suffering is also a condition of being without pleasure, because pleasure and pain are always intermixed, just as someone who wishes to administer a bitter poison, mixes it into honey![14]

Another commentator, Uddyotakara, however, thinks that one should include as causes of suffering both erroneous beliefs and 'cravings' (*tṛṣṇā*), as well as merit and demerit. He considers that the condition of abandonment is having knowledge of the real nature of things, and the method for acquiring it to be the philosophical treatises (*śāstra*), and distinguishes that condition of abandonment from the final goal, liberation.[15] More generally, if it is knowledge of the 'real nature' of things which is sought, then the methods – the 'exercises' – will be ones of studying, debating and examining with the help of evidence. These have approximate counterparts in the spiritual exercises documented by Hadot (pp. 84, 89, 153).

[12] *Nyāya-bhāṣya* 2, 14–16.

[13] Ibid., 7, 1–11.

[14] Ibid., 8, 4.

[15] *Nyāya-vārttika* 3, 18–4, 1. Page and line numbers refer to *Nyāyabhāṣyavārttika of Uddyotakara*, critical ed. Anantalal Thakur (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1997).

Uddyotakara's remarks are clearly influenced by Buddhism, where all unwholesome emotions, it is claimed, have a possessive ingredient, which philosophical knowledge about the impossibility of possessing can eliminate. Hatred, for example, is the belief that the person hated is preventing me from getting something I crave; if I come to know that the true nature of things is that everything is in flux and so there can be neither possessed nor possessor, then it is impossible (or at least irrational) to continue to feel that way.

If we return to our earlier discussion, the therapeutic model outlined in both the Yoga and Nyāya schools of ancient Indian philosophy also seems to be one of 'subtraction'. In every case, there is an elimination of suffering (in all its forms), leading to states of spiritual wholeness conceived of either as the self in isolation or the self as free from lusts, aversions, painful or pleasurable alike. A slightly later Nyāya philosopher has expressed the matter very clearly: 'In eliminating its particular qualities, the self rests in its own natural state; being permanent, it is not itself eliminated.'[16] In these systems, acquiring knowledge of a certain privileged sort is the key spiritual exercise, and so, as is perhaps most explicitly stated by Naiyāyikas, the study and practice of philosophy – reading philosophical texts, debating, engaging in acts of public and practical reason – is the fundamental activity in what Hadot has appropriately described as a 'return to the self'.

Plutarch and the Buddhists: Returning Oneself to the Present

Instead of a model based on the activity of a sculptor, Plutarch speaks instead of weaving or painting a life with the help of active memory, allowing the memory of unpleasant things to form the muted backdrop against which more pleasant memories can shine out and be made prominent. I will quote Plutarch's important and densely argued passage in full:

> But just as the man pictured in Hades plaiting a rope allows a grazing donkey to consume what he is plaiting, so forgetfulness, unaware of most things and ungrateful, snatches and overruns things, obliterating every action and right act, every pleasant discussion, meeting, or enjoyment, and does not allow our life to be unified, through the past being woven together with the future. . . . But those who do not

[16] Śrīdhara (*c.* 990 CE), in the *Nyāyakaṇḍalī: Praśastapādabhāṣyam of Praśastapāda with the commentary Nyāyakaṇḍalī by Śrīdhara Bhaṭṭa*, ed. Durgādhara Jhā (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 1997), p. 17.

> preserve or retrieve the past in memory, but allow it to flow away from under them, make themselves needy every day in actual fact, and empty and dependent on tomorrow, as if last year and yesterday and the day before were nothing to them and had not actually happened to them. . . . What we should do is make the bright and shining events prominent in the mind, like the colours in a picture, and hide and suppress the gloomy ones, since we cannot rub them out or get rid of them altogether.[17]

I find in the contrast between Plotinus and Plutarch the reflection of a more general contrast between two interpretations of the spiritual exercises. In the first interpretation, the value of the spiritual exercises is restorative, returning the person to a state of mental health or wholeness from which they have departed. According to the second interpretation, the spiritual exercises are instead generative, producing in the person a condition (for example, an 'identity' or 'character') that had not been there before.

It is not entirely clear whether Plutarch's view about weaving is that there is no *self* until one is woven, or if his view is that the weaving fashions, for a person who is already there, an identity, character, or personality that is their own.[18] Elsewhere he speaks as if in favour of the view that there are no continuous selves:

> The man of yesterday has died and turned into the man of today, and the man of today is dying in turning into the man of tomorrow. No one stays still, or is a single person, but we become many, with matter whirling and sliding round a single image and a shared mould. . . . Each of us is compounded of hundreds of different factors which arise in the course of our experience, a heterogeneous collection combined in a haphazard way.[19]

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[17] Plutarch, *On Tranquillity*, 473 B–474 B; trans. Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, pp. 232–3.

[18] For a subtle and extensive discussion of Plutarch's view about the self, see Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insigh*ts *about Individuality, Life and Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), chapter 9.

[19] Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi*, 392 B, trans. Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, p. 248; and 393 B, trans. Frank Babbitt, *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. V (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1936).

Sorabji has argued that this passage is incompatible with the earlier one about weaving, and possibly represents a poorly integrated acquaintance with Buddhist ideas about the self:

> Plutarch could have argued consistently, if he had chosen, that the short-term selves should be woven into a long-term biography. But, in fact, when he recommends biographical weaving, he treats the short-term selves of the Growing Argument as no more than a simile. And in practice, it would not have been possible to combine the therapy of weaving, to produce tranquillity, with the therapy of dwelling on discontinuity to allay fear of death.[20]

And again,

> If [Plutarch and Seneca] really mean the same [as the Buddhists], it will be incompatible with the rest of what they say, which suggests that it could be an alien growth. . . . [I]t is incompatible with . . . Plutarch's belief that we have genuine memories that we can use to weave our lives into a unity. . . . Plutarch might be expected to say no more than that one acquires a new identity in an everyday sense.[21]

For Plutarch, the spiritual exercises help us not fret about the past or worry about the future, but they do so by encouraging us to see the good and the bad as belonging within a harmoniously unified whole life, with the bad providing a dim backdrop to the more pleasant. Plutarch sees no therapeutic value in thinking of our past miseries as simply flowing away and ceasing to belong to us.

It is open, of course, even for someone who thinks that the self is just a river of fleeting experience to find value in weaving together everything that is in their mind at a given moment, including the (merely apparent) memories they have; and indeed the possibility which Sorabji envisages but does not attribute to Plutarch might be what some Buddhists have in mind when they speak of constructing a sense of self by way of an activity involving the 'appropriation' (*upādāna*) of one's memory and experience.[22] More often, though, the resonance is with those spiritual exercises

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[20] Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, p. 248.

[21] Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insigh*ts, pp. 39–40.

[22] I have discussed this Buddhist view in my *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), chapters 6, 7.

which involve an attention to the present moment, and indeed a reduction of oneself to a single point in time. Buddhists argue, unlike Plutarch, that there *is* therapeutic value in the idea that there are no continuous selves. The line of thought is roughly as follows: thinking that there are no continuous selves is an 'antidote' to the belief that the self is continuous or permanent, but this second belief is what makes it possible for you to 'crave' for things you do not yet have, or mourn that which you have lost. Since unsatisfied cravings are the source of 'suffering' in all its forms, we cure ourselves of suffering with the remedy that is the idea that there are no continuous selves (and that there are no continuous objects of craving either). Reminiscent, in a way, of Marcus Aurelius' advice to live each day as if it is one's last,[23] the idea is that it is hard to worry about the future if one does not expect to be there. For example, *Milinda-pañhā* 4.2.3:

> It was in regard to those beings who have defilements and in whom there is an excessively wrong view of self and in regard to those who are uplifted and downcast by pleasures and pains that it was said by the Lord [Buddha]: 'All tremble at punishment, all fear death.'[24]

Neither, perhaps, will one be greatly agitated by the memory of past calamities, although one will be able to feel compassion for that other one upon whom they fell. Another line of thought agrees that individuals do construct lives and characters and personae for themselves, but sees the function of the spiritual exercises as one of dismantling these constructs, in order to return them to a state in harmony with nature, rather than to the self. Many Buddhists too, especially those within the Abhidharma school, have proposed the use of exercises of breakdown and dissolution, as did the Buddha himself. In the *Simile of the Lute*, for example, the Buddha explains that if one looks within and investigates, one will find only the psychological elements and not the self, just as one will search in vain among the components of a lute for the sound that the lute makes:

> 'This lute, sire, consists of numerous components, of a great many components, and it gives off a sound when it is played upon with its numerous components; that is, in dependence on the parchment

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[23] *Meditations* 2.5. Cf. also 8.5: 'Fret not thyself, for all things are as the Nature of the Universe would have them, and within a little thou shalt be non-existent'.

[24] Translated by I. B. Horner. *Milinda's Questions*, vol. 1, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, reprinted 1996), p. 204.

> sounding board, the belly, the arm, the head, the strings, the plectrum, and the appropriate effort of the musician.. . .' So too, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu investigates form . . . feeling . . . perception. . . volitional formations . . . consciousness. As he investigates form . . . feeling . . . perception . . . volitional formations . . . consciousness, whatever notions of 'I' or 'mine' or 'I am' had occurred to him before no longer occur to him. [25]

This is the way, the Buddha explains, for someone in whom lust, desire, hatred, or delusion has arisen to acquire a mind that is steady, settled, unified, and concentrated. The concept of self upon which those possessive emotions depend does not survive an analytical breakup of the mind into its components, any more than the sound made by the lute survives if the lute is broken into its parts. In the *Simile of the Lute*, the aesthetic analogy is used to compare the self with a piece of music in the air, and the point of the analogy is to emphasise that it has an ephemeral nature.

The idea that one should aim to reduce one's sense of self to a point in time is evident in Āryadeva's verse, 'What is called someone's life is nothing other than a moment of consciousness. People certainly do not know this; consequently self-knowledge is rare' (*Catuḥśataka* 1.10). The seventh-century Buddhist Candrakīrti explains that

> People, with such misleading ideas as 'this is that' and 'the self is that,' attribute unity to a continuum of constructed things, a continuum that is not something different from the individual things that constitute it. For this reason, they act without understanding that it is momentary. Consequently, it is difficult to find among people anyone who understands the nature of the self. Someone who knows the nature of the self does not engage in harmful actions, because there is no longer a reason for error. Since people, for the most part, are prone to harmful actions, self-knowledge is rare in the world. Therefore, intelligent people, with great enthusiasm, should constantly exert themselves to analyse the nature of the self.[26]

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[25] Saṃyutta Nikāya iv 197–8; translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 1254.

[26] Translated by Karen C. Lang in *Four Illusions: Candrakīrti's Advice to Travellers on the Bodhisattva Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), §41. There are many other Buddhist manuals of spiritual exercises, including notably Buddhaghoṣa's 'Path of Purification' (*Visuddhimagga*) and Śāntideva's 'Guide to the Path to Buddhist Awakening' (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*).

Coming to know that there is no enduring self is thus clearly seen as a therapeutic philosophical achievement. No emotion that requires one to admit the existence of enduring self, such as regret or possessive desire, is able to survive the surgical removal of that commitment. Though possibly free of regret and anxiety, such a life may be, as Plutarch suggests, a 'needy' one, for one will need constantly to be affirmed in the present; one will have neither a past nor a future to sustain one. The therapy of 'dwelling on discontinuity' is intended to do more, however, than merely allay a fear of death, even if that fear is the basis of many others; it does also produce tranquillity by removing unwelcome emotions. If anything, the problem is that it does too much – for will it not also eliminate wholesome emotions like hope? Perhaps the real significance of exercises like this is that what they claim, in effect, is that one should learn to value one's integrity at any moment above one's identity over time.

A Life Complete at Every Moment

There are, however, dissident voices here too. One of these rejects the aesthetic model altogether, whether it sees life as sculpting a self or weaving a persona and narrating a biography. For any artistic endeavour might be ended before it has reached completion, and any work of art might be left unfinished. A human life, however, it has sometimes been suggested, is complete at every moment; and if that is right, then the aesthetic analogy in any of its modes is singularly inappropriate. Marcus Aurelius points out the disanalogy with reference to aesthetic activities like drama and dancing:

> Nor is his life cut short, when the day of destiny overtakes him, as we might say of a tragedian's part, who leaves the stage before finishing his speech and playing out the piece. (3.8)
>
> In dancing and acting and such-like arts, if any break occurs, the whole action is rendered imperfect; but the rational soul in every part and wheresoever taken shews the work set before it fulfilled and all-sufficient for itself, so that it can say: I have to the full what is my own. (11.1)

It is with the same idea, an idea antithetical to the aesthetic paradigm, that the *Meditations* is brought to an end (12.35–6). Among the Indians,

the thought seems to me most clearly and beautifully expressed by Rabindranath Tagore:

> A young friend of mine comes to me this morning to inform me that it is his birthday and that he has just reached his nineteenth year. The distance between my age and his is great, and yet when I look at him it is not the incompleteness of his life which strikes me, but something which is complete in his youth. And in this differs the thing which grows from the thing which is being made. A building in its unfinished stage is only too evidently unfinished. But *in life's growth every stage has its perfection*, the flower as well as the fruit.[27]
>
> There are men whose idea of life is static, who long for its continuation after death only because of their wish for permanence and not perfection; they love to imagine that the things to which they are accustomed will persist for ever. They completely identify themselves in their minds with their fixed surroundings and with whatever they have gathered, and to have to leave these is death for them. They forget that the *true meaning of living is outliving*, it is ever growing out of itself. The fruit clings to its stem, its skin clings to the pulp and the pulp to the seed so long as the fruit is immature, so long as it is not ready for its course of further life. Its outer covering and its inner core are not yet differentiated and it only proves its life by its strength of tenacity. But when the seed is ripe its hold upon its surrounding is loosened, its pulp attains fragrance, sweetness and detachment, and is dedicated to all who need it. Birds peck at it and it is not hurt, the storm plucks it and flings it to the dust and it is not destroyed. It proves its immortality by its renunciation.[28]

As a mode of being-in-the-world, learning to think of one's life as complete at each moment seems to me to have many advantages. It does not require that one attach no value to the past or the future in order to allay dismay and anxiety, nor to think of oneself or the world as only momentary. Also, it does not expect of us the high-mindedness necessary to see oneself wholly objectively in terms of one's place in the cosmos. I am not convinced that Tagore's analogy with organic growth is entirely successful, and would prefer to say that one's life is not so much a work of art as a

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[27] Rabindranath Tagore, *Thought Relics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912), p. 98; my italics.

[28] Tagore, *Thought Relics*, p. 40; my italics.

work indefinitely extendable, adding to itself as a city might a new building or suburb, without any implication that what exists before the addition is unfinished.[29]

Taming the Self

A fascinating discussion of the goals and ambitions of human life is to be found tucked away in four short sections of the *Śāntiparvan*, a voluminous book of philosophical reflection embedded within the body of the *Mahābhārata*. The text represents a clear attempt to absorb and integrate general ethical insights into the moral framework of the Hindu epic. It can be read, therefore, as an attempt to articulate a set of widespread ethical concerns. What is the 'highest good' (*niḥśreyasa*)? The *Śāntiparvan* gives a direct and unequivocal answer: it is the taming (*dama*) of the self (12.154.7).[30] Taming the self is a subduing, a rendering calm or tranquil, a pacification. What needs to be tamed is the self's inclination to reach out to things that are 'external' to oneself (where 'external' means both physically exterior and outside of one's influence); so taming is a pulling back, a drawing in, a restraint (cf. *Bhagavad-gītā* 10.4); it is a form of self-control. One who achieves this is without fear, anger, or envy, and has a profound steadiness of mind (*gāmbhīrya dhairya*; 12.156.12), that is, an imperturbability in the face of either pain or pleasure (12.156.9). This is because 'reaching out' is greed, a wish to obtain (*lobha*), and from this arises both anger and desire. With this in check, one lives the life glorified as one of wise conduct (*śiṣṭācāra*), namely the life of one who is fearless in the face of death, equal in the face of pleasure or pain, self-controlled, and impartial (12.152.20–6), delighting in no acquisition and pained by no loss. Such a person lives as one for whom acting well is just like a movement of one's body; in particular, there is no ulterior cause for such activity, such as wealth or fame (12.152.27).

It takes knowledge (*jñāna*) to achieve such a life, for greed and ignorance go hand in hand (12.153). What, though, is the role of knowledge in 'taming' the self? Greed is a failure to understand that none of the things one seeks to obtain is going to last (12.157); it should also be

[29] This same line of argument speaks against the so-called 'narrative' conception of self. Related ideas pertain to healthy and dynamic intellectual traditions of thought, as I will show in Chapter 14.

[30] Vishnu S. Sukthankar, S. K. Belvalkar et al., *Mahābhārata,* critical edition (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–1966).

understood that greed is, of its nature, insatiable (12.152). Anger is greed together with a sensitivity to other people's faults, and so is removed by tolerance (*kṣamā*), which comes from forbearance (*kṣānti*). The result of anger is desire (*kāma*), which arises from wilfully wanting something (*saṃkalpa*).

A beautiful metaphor is used to illustrate this conception of the self-controlled life. One who lives wisely is said to tread softly on the earth: 'As the track of birds along the sky or of fowl over the surface of water cannot be discerned, even so the track of such a person does not attract notice.' Such a life has but one drawback, and this is that a person who lives thus is regarded by others as weak and simple. But for this, those others can be forgiven, and a life so lived is one from which one does not need to retreat: 'What need has a man of self-control for a forest? Similarly, of what use is a forest to him that has no self-control? That is a forest where the man of self-control dwells, and that is even a sacred asylum.' This, clearly, is not a transcendental, privative, ideal, but a way of living in the world, in a human community, one in which one can adopt either the practices of the cities or those of the forest. This life, the life of a *dānta*, a 'tamed' one, it is said, is one of tranquillity (*praśama*; 12.154.18).

Philosophy and the Ends of Life

That epistemic practices have a role in living a life well, in forming an identity, is asserted explicitly in the *Śāntiparvan* analysis: *knowing* that desires are insatiable and the things desired unstable is a solution to anger and greed. Yet it is not very explicit just how it is that knowledge, or philosophy more generally, can serve in this way. Perhaps that is not surprising, for the *Śāntiparvan* is not a work of academic philosophy; it is a work of epic literature. So let us turn to the professional philosophers, specifically the practitioners of Nyāya. They say that the study of philosophy is indispensable in reaching the highest good: 'What leads to the highest good is knowledge (*tattvajnāña*),' specifically knowledge of the methods of inquiry and their objects, including the forms of debate (NS 1.1.1). The connection is this: 'In the sequence of suffering, rebirth, activity, moral failing, and cognitive error, removing each by removing its successor leads to liberation (*apavarga*)' (NS 1.1.2). That is to say, moral failings are produced and sustained by cognitive errors, so if the error is removed, the moral failing will disappear too. Likewise, moral failings indirectly result in and sustain suffering, and a state free of suffering is the result of their removal.

One fundamental way in which you go wrong is to mistake a thing for its opposite. You 'mistake suffering for pleasure, the unreal for the real, that which is not a remedy for a remedy, the afraid for the fearless', and so on (*Nyāyabhāṣya* under 1.1.2). You mistakenly think of 'liberation' as a state of complete insentience, and so as quite undesirable. These cognitive errors instil in you wants and aversions, and that leads you to moral failings like falsehood, malice, deception and greed. These failings in your moral psychology make you act immorally too; you engage in harmful acts towards others: theft, lies, rudeness, and fault-finding. These contrast sharply with the virtues of thought, word and deed for which you strive.

Why, though, is it claimed that cognitive errors lead you to desire *per se*, rather than to desire the wrong things? Mistaking a seashell for a piece of silver, I might want to go after it; and if I did, I would be desiring something which is not really there. But had it *really* had been a piece of silver, there seems to be nothing wrong with my wish to obtain it. The answer, presumably, is that we are not speaking here of ordinary empirical knowledge, but of that philosophical wisdom one derives from the *śāstra*s. If I do not know what good evidence is, I cannot know if any of my beliefs matches up to it. But if I do not know this, then acting on anything I believe, true or false, would carry with it a degree of moral risk. The elimination of moral risk requires that I have 'theoretical' expertise in the arts of knowing. One might live a life that happened to be free from mistakes entirely by chance, but that would not be a good life. For a life to be a good one, the absence of suffering must rest on something more secure than chance.

How does one discriminate between a thing and a masquerade of it? How does one distinguish between a true pleasure and a pain that passes itself off as a pleasure? This, exactly, is what philosophy excels in: distinguishing between pretence and truth, for instance, the difference between a good argument and an argument that only pretends to be a good one, that is, a piece of sophistry. Philosophy shows us how to see through the pretences of reason. Without a secure ability to do that, our attempts to live well in thought, deed and speech are subject to moral risk. Uddyotakara raises a further issue: incompatible beliefs cannot simultaneously be rationally entertained, but what ensures that truth trumps error? According to him, it is only that true beliefs have a foundation that the false ones lack.

It is true that a great deal is said about such transcendental spiritual goals as *mokṣa*, *mukti*, and *nirvāṇa*, and that these goals are represented as an ultimate, idealised aspiration for all. Human beings, though, do not aspire actually to become sages; rather, they take the image of the sage as a *device* to help them pursue those goals that are properly their own.

Thinking about *mokṣa* and *nirvāṇa*, as well as about the *buddha*s and the *ṛṣi*s, helps us to actualise the human ends that are ours. Entertaining the idea that one is striving for a transcendent ideal might itself be a 'spiritual exercise,' a practice that forms a part of the good for a human being. If that is right, then it would be a mistake to read the descriptions of the transcendental states and the means to reach them as if they were literal expressions of a path from the world of men to the world of the gods. For the Indians, no doubt, these ideal states are given a characterisation in largely privative terms, as states free from pain, free from suffering, free from anger and desire, and often, indeed, free from pleasure too. The idea that what one should aim for is an existence that is so colourless has been one reason that European philosophers have struggled to engage with the Indian philosophical imagination. From my point of view, the very fact that the ideal states are described in such unappealing terms shows us that these are not really intended as descriptions of the good for human beings. The question to ask is a different one: namely, how might entertaining the idea that one is striving to achieve such a state help one get *somewhere*; and indeed, where might one be attempting to get for this to be an appropriate method for getting there? Might it be, for example, that reflecting on the nature of an existence entirely void of either pleasure or pain will help us to re-examine the relationship between these two? One might be led, for example, not to eschew pleasures altogether, but to be somewhat wary of them: to aim to live in such a way that pleasure is not itself the motivation of one's actions. Believing that the ideal state is a pleasureless state might lead me, not to give up all pleasure, for that is not a realistic human end, but to allow myself to be nourished by the pleasures I have and also to resist voluntarily seeking out new ones. That is, entertaining such an ideal might lead me to a life characterised as one of restraint and self-control.

Philosophy, then, enables us to see through the pretences of reason, and so makes it possible for us to direct our efforts securely on their target, the living of a life free of suffering. This is not a life of insentient catatonia, for having as our outside aim a life free of suffering does not imply that the life which ensues is devoid of pleasure. It implies only that the pleasures are, as it were, collateral: that their presence does not distract us from our ultimate aims. A life of the restrained mind is a life in which pleasure provides neither the goal nor the motivating reason, but such need not be a life without pleasure.

What the above discussion reveals is that there are choices to be made about the temporal spread of one's identity, about the role of emotions within it, and about the extent to which one sees one's identity

as something that transcends local affiliations. Modern individuals may not agree with the choices the ancients made, but what is instructive is to see the methods by which those choices are made and justified. Above all, what is clear is the extent to which individuals fashion their own identities through the choices they make about what to value. The very availability of such choices, and of the freedom that their existence implies, can seem ephemeral; it can easily seem that one has no such choice at all. In Chapter 12 I will discuss the ways in which illusions about the self gain their grip, and the role of reason in undermining them. Before that, I want to add specificity to the emerging account by looking at several issues that earlier thinkers have seen as particularly relevant in the rational formation of an identity.

11

Problems of Self and Identity

In the last chapter I set out the general and abstract form of a series of arguments that reason is implicated in the formation of identity. Now, to add specificity to the discussion, I want to take up several individual topics, all of which have received much discussion in Indian theory, pertaining to the fashioning of a self. The particular topics I will discuss are: the significance of countenancing the possibility of reincarnation; whether it makes sense to draw a distinction between a higher and a lower self; the role of conscience; the question of what it might mean to deny that one has a self at all; and, perhaps most importantly, the question of what is involved in being true to one's individual self.

Reincarnation and Personal Identity

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna not to worry about the people whose bodies he is about to pierce with arrows, because, after all, 'As a man casts off his worn-out clothes and takes on new ones, so does the embodied [self] cast off its worn-out bodies and enter other new ones'.[1] There is something not quite right about thinking of this as a case of reincarnation. Reincarnation isn't simply a matter of getting a new body, as one might get a new set of clothes from the shop. The Emperor Julian believed that he was the reincarnation of Alexander the Great,[2] but he was not like the deranged person who believes that they really are Napoleon, nor was his

[1] *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.22.

[2] See Alexander Alexakis, 'Was There Life Beyond the Life Beyond? Byzantine Ideas about Reincarnation and Final Restoration', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2002), p. 164, reporting the Church History of Socrates.

case like the case of the woman who really believed that she was her father, even when she was shown her reflection in a mirror.[3] So, as Plotinus said, it looks more as if reincarnation implies that two *different* persons, for instance Pythagoras and Socrates, share a common soul.[4]

This cannot be very satisfactory either, however, because it would imply that one person's soul could be taken off in a different moral direction by someone else. But if sharing a soul does after all imply preservation of personal identity, then we need at least to have an account of the psychological linkages between Pythagoras and Socrates that would make them be the same person, at different times, in different bodies. The Indians provide a rich description of such person-shaped psychological linkages, including dispositional traces, habits, talents and, most interestingly, the category of linkage that includes one's memory of past future-directed aspirations. It is one thing for Julian to claim to remember some of Alexander's experiences and exploits as his own, but something else and deeper for him to remember Alexander's plans and projects and to feel them as past aspirations which are his to fulfil.

The memory of a past anticipation is a particularly important vehicle in weaving a psychology into a person. Vaiśeṣika philosophers distinguish between various sorts of pleasure, and identify the anticipation of a future pleasure as itself pleasurable in a certain way.[5] One might, for example, anticipate the pleasure of victory while in the midst of the battle. And when one is enjoying that later pleasure, one might think back to the time when one anticipated it, and look upon one's present happiness as realising or fulfilling that anticipation. I think one can certainly say that being in such a mental state is quite different from simply enjoying the pleasure of victory as such. A distinctive phenomenology of satisfaction and frustration, implied by the Indian terms *sukha* and *duḥkha*, is characteristic of the psychological life of a single person.

Psychological linkages across incarnations are discussed by the commentators on *Nyāya-sūtra* 3.1.18. This sūtra argues that a neonate experiences the emotions of fear (*bhaya*), sorrow (*śoka*), and delight (*harṣa*), emotions

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[3] See N. Breen, D. Caine, M. Coltheart, J. Hendy and C. Roberts, 'Towards an Understanding of Delusions of Misidentification: Four Case Studies', in M. Coltheart and M. Davies (eds), *Pathologies of Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

[4] Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.7.1, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library edition (Cambridge, MA: HarvardUniversity Press,1966) pp. 1–6.

[5] Praśastapāda, *Padārtha-dharma-saṃgraha* 2.13, and the commentaries of Śrīdhara and Udayana on the sentences 'atīteṣu viṣayeṣu smṛti-jam | anāgateṣu saṃkalpa-jam |'

which it says follow on the heels of a memory of some repeated experience in the past. A later philosopher analyses these emotions as follows. Delight is the experience of pleasure one has on fulfilling a longing for something desired. Fear is an inability to rid oneself of the wish to flee in the presence of what will lead to something undesired. Sorrow is the unfulfillable longing for something desired from which one is separated.[6] Elsewhere, desire is defined as an unfulfilled longing for something one wants but does not have, a category that includes the anticipation (*saṃkalpa*) of a future pleasure.[7] So, for example, one feels delight when one obtains something which one remembers longing for. Experiences like these are complex psychological events, and only occur as part of a richly woven psychological life. The argument of *Nyāya-sūtra* 3.1.18–26 is that they do occur in newly born infants, and this proves that the newborn has a soul from a past life. It can be inferred that they are felt by newly born infants because such infants smile, cry and flinch. It is only with this last inference, it seems to me, that the argument runs into trouble.

If one feels, as I think many of the Indians do, that it would still be good to be able to distinguish between a person who is the reincarnation of someone else, and a person who is that very person but just in another body (the difference between Julian as the reincarnation of Alexander, and Alexander himself, alive and well, but in the body of Julian), one might retain the distinction by thinking of a person as a continuous body within which these kinds of person-shaped psychological linkages occur. In cases of reincarnation, when the person-shaped psychological linkages span discrete bodies, the distinction between being-that-person and being-a-reincarnation-of-that-person would be preserved, but it would also be intelligible why reincarnation presents itself as like a case of 'same person, different body'. I think that such an account would be consistent with the Buddhist view that a person is an aggregate of the physical *and* psychological streams, and that it would also explain why belief in reincarnation seems to be independent of belief in substantial souls; for, as both Kant and Locke pointed out, the presence of a substantial soul does not help

[6] These definitions are provided by Uddyotakara in his *Vārttika* on *Nyāya-sūtra* 3.1.18. The text reads: abhipreta-viṣaya-prārthanāprāptau sukhānubhavo harṣaḥ | aniṣṭa-viṣaya-sādhana-sannipāte tajjihāsorhānāśakyatā bhayam | iṣṭa-viṣaya-viyoge sati tatprāptyaśakya-prārthanā śokaḥ |

[7] Praśastapāda, *Padārtha-dharma-saṃgraha* 8.15: svārthaṃ parārthaṃ vā 'prāpta-prārthanecchā | . . . | kāmo 'bhilāṣo rāgaḥ saṃkalpaḥ kāruṇyaṃ vairāgyam upadhā bhāva ity evam ādaya icchā-bhedāḥ |

with the problem of the identity of the person. One might also argue that the psychological linkages that must exist for a person to be the reincarnation of an earlier individual are similar in kind, but not as strong as, the ones that hold within a single person.

Higher and Lower Selves

There are certainly close similarities between Plotinus' quest to identify himself with the divine intellect within him, and the Upaniṣadic ambition of asserting the identity of *ātman* with *brahman* (see Chapter 12). But what about the more specific and fascinating question, whether in any sense one's individuality would survive such an identification? Plotinus says, metaphorically, that one would be like a theorem in a mathematical system.[8] In the Indian situation, it is not so much that one manages to identify oneself with *brahman* as that one successfully frees oneself of the illusion that one is different. As I will discuss in Chapter 12, the injunction 'Know thyself' would have, in this view, a clear epistemology. This implies, first of all, that one was identical with *brahman* all along, and, second, that the individuality which one possesses is the result of a mistake. That would suggest that it is a mistake that each individual can make in their own distinctive way, and there is also the possibility that some residue of this mistake, or rather the distinctive way it was made, might remain even when the mistake has been seen though, just as coming to know that something is simply a *trompe-l'oeil* does not completely dispel the appearance. Philosophers in the tradition of Advaita Vedānta have tried to make sense of this complex situation by appealing, as did Plotinus, to metaphors. For some of them, the right metaphor to choose is as follows.[9] We say that within a house there are many different spaces, because there are many rooms separated by walls. In reality, however, there is just one space, and the walls are merely imposed delimitations upon it (just as one divides up time into days and years).[10] The relation between individuals and *brahman* is just the same. Perhaps it is possible to see how, even after one has come to understand that one is just a delimited 'region' of *brahman*, the

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[8] Plotinus, *Ennead* 4.3.2 (49–58).

[9] For details see Srinivasa Chari, *Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita*, revised 2nd edn (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004,), pp. 69–74; K. Narain, *The Fundamentals of Advaita Vedānta* (Varanasi: Indological Research Centre, 2003), pp. 223–32.

[10] Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* 1.1.31, 1.4.22.

seen-through illusion can persist enough for some sense of individuality to remain.

Other philosophers experimented with another metaphor, saying that the relationship between *brahman* and individual selves is akin to the situation in which the moon is reflected in a pond. Different people see different reflections, even though there is just one moon. So individuality is an illusion of perspective.[11] I think that this metaphor is in some ways closer to the one used by Plotinus, especially if that one works by appealing to the idea of a distinctive focus of attention. One difference is that here, again, the element of illusion plays an important part, as is indicated by the reference to reflections which are, in some sense, not really there (or, at least, not where they appear to be). This metaphor is especially amenable to the suggestion I am making, that some residue of the illusion persists even when it has been consciously recognised as just an illusion, because of the well-known fact that visual illusions continue to trick the eye even when the perceiver knows of their illusory nature, like the submerged stick continuing to look bent.

Philosophers in the Vaiśeṣika school do not agree that there is an identity between individual and divine self, either actual or strived for, and they explain those Vedic passages which seem to countenance such an identity as having the therapeutic function of encouraging us to engage in an imaginative exercise.[12] These philosophers argue that what such exercises help us towards is not identification with *brahman*, but rather, as I described in Chapter 10, to reflect on the consequences of a state of disembodied existence (actual or imagined), such a state being one in which one is free from all the emotional and cognitive turmoil associated with embodiment. This leads them to address the problem of individuality in a different guise, however, because the disembodied selves retain their individuality but can no longer be told apart by way of their by now rather minimal psychological properties (it isn't wholly clear to me whether the Vaiśeṣika can permit their disembodied individual selves anything analogous to thinking about universal Platonic forms, but the consensus of opinion seems to be that they do not).[13] For the Vaiśeṣika philosopher, the problem is similar to that of distinguishing between different individual

[11] Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* 2.3.50.

[12] Viśvanātha, *Karikāvalī*, ed. C. S. R. Shastri (Delhi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishthan, 1988), p. 399.

[13] Vyomaśiva, *Vyomavatī*, ed. Gaurinath Sastri (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 1983), p. 285.

atoms of a single substance. The fact that each atom moves along its own individual spatio-temporal path is not enough to individuate it, because – they claim – an atom can be reidentified without having been tracked, and they therefore conclude that each atom, and likewise each self, has its own special uniquely individuating feature, a *viśeṣa*, something possibly akin to the medieval haecceities proposed by Duns Scotus in the thirteenth century.

Bad Thoughts and Conscience

If conscience means an acquaintance with the moral value of one's own thoughts, traits and deeds, then it might fairly be said that much of Indian moral philosophy consists in the science of its cultivation. And since identity is formed through the rational endorsement of such values, the topic of conscience is clearly of importance to the theme of this book. In Buddhism, the term *tṛṣṇā* (Pāli: *taṇhā*) denotes all those 'cravings' which lead us into distress, and the fourth noble truth describes the various forms of self-knowledge which eradicate them. The Indian discussion bears greater resemblance, I feel, to the pagan Greek theory of the concept than to the subsequent Christian re-working, especially because notions of sin, temptation and evil are not as central in the Indian framework. In Nyāya, for example, God's function is to fashion the cosmos out of its atoms, as a potter fashions a piece of clay into a pot; his role is not to relieve us of our bad thoughts through his good Grace. Our bad thoughts are a product of our culpable ignorance, and the way to eradicate them is to become better informed.

The understanding of conscience as an inner voice speaking to me, or a guardian spirit telling me what not to do, is not one I have so far found much evidence of in the Indians, except possibly in the epic references to a state of mental anguish (*mānas-tāpaḥ*), which might be regarded as being indicative of an inner moral discomfort. In two places, however, Manu states that the moral law has four foundations, and includes as the last of them 'that which is pleasing to oneself'.[14] The thought appears to be that when confronted with an otherwise insuperable moral conflict, when the

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[14] *Manu-smṛti* 2.6 uses the expression *ātmanas tuṣṭir*, while at *Manu-smṛti* 2.12 the phrase is *svasya priyam ātmanaḥ* (this is also the phrase used by Yājñavalkya 1.7). Robert Lingat is willing to paraphrase these expressions as 'approval of one's conscience', in his *The Classical Law of India* (California: University of California Press, 1973), p. 6. I referred to it as 'the heart's approval' when I discussed the concept in Chapter 7.

declarations of the lawbooks contradict one another, or else are completely silent, and when no guidance is to be had either from the way good people conduct themselves or from the use of reason, then consulting one's own inner moral feeling is permissible. Yājñavalkya even adds that it is sometimes morally permissible to consult one's 'appropriate' desires.[15] As far as I am aware, little use seems to have been made by later Indian thinkers of the possibilities these texts open up. Only Vīramitrodaya (commenting on Yājñavalkya) develops the idea, saying that the consultation of one's inner feeling is decisive in scenarios such as deciding when one has done enough penance for some past misdemeanour, and he notes that this is an entirely individual matter and that what one decides applies only to oneself and to nobody else.[16]

There are echoes of Stoic theory and also of Evagrius' celebrated categorisation of 'bad thoughts' in a chapter of the *Mahābhārata* near the end of that great epic, the part of the text that deals with philosophical ideas.[17] The fundamental source of bad thoughts is here declared to be greed (*lobha*), greed produces lust (*kāma*) and anger (*krodha*) in the first instance, anger at who or what prevents one from getting the things one lusts after. From these follow envy (*akṣamā*), shamelessness (*hrī-parityāga*), loss of dignity (*śrī-nāśa*), loss of morals (*dharma-saṃkṣaya*), covetousness (*abhidhyā*) and so on. The text now states that greed is on the same footing as (culpable?) ignorance (*ajñāna*). Ignorance produces, in the first instance, distress (*duḥkha*), and a host of emotions, including passion (*rāga*), dread or aversion (*dveṣa*), delight (*harṣa*), sorrow (*śoka*), pride (*abhimānitā*; thinking well of oneself); lust (*kāma*), anger (*krodha*), haughtiness (*darpa*) also follow on. Ignorance and greed, going hand in hand, are the root causes of all bad thoughts and emotions. They must be counteracted, and what counteracts them are self-control (*dama*) and self-restraint (*tapas*). As we saw in Chapter 10, self-control consists in having a tranquil, calm state of mind. Self-restraint includes a variety of things, but the best and highest form of self-restraint is said to be abstinence from food. The discussion is wound up by reiterating that anger and lust give

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[15] Yājñavalkya 1.7: samyak-saṃkalpaḥ kāmaḥ. *Yājñavalkya's Smṛti with the Mitakṣara*, ed. S. C. Vasu (Allahabad: The Panini Office, 1909), p. 16.

[16] The commentaries on Manu 2.6 and Yājñavalkya 1.7 are helpfully surveyed by Ganganatha Jha in his *Studies in Hindu Law* (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit University Press, 1992), pp. 53–55.

[17] *Mahābhārata,* book 12 (*Śāntiparvan*), chapters 152–157; critically ed. S. K. Belvalkar (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1954), vol. 14, pp. 841–62.

rise to 13 sorts of badness, including the ones already listed above, and that tranquillity of soul (*praśama*) is what, ultimately, destroys them.

All this certainly has intriguing similarities with the Stoic theory as adapted by Evagrius. Anger and lust are two of the eight sorts of involuntary bad thoughts he identified: avarice and gluttony (forms of greed) being two others. He also mentions distress, pride and vanity, which find a place in the above system. But he does not mention ignorance; and of his eighth kind of bad thought, boredom, there does not seem to be an analogue in the *Mahābhārata* scheme. Boredom and ignorance are perhaps related, in that both imply a certain mental idleness. Or perhaps it is just that boredom was an exceptionally serious issue for the desert hermit.

No Self?

The Buddhists say that there are no selves, and, since wrong beliefs lead to 'craving' (*tṛṣṇā*), and craving leads to distress, it is ethically incumbent on us to identify and address the false idea of self. Other philosophers in India were not slow to point out that without persisting selves, the idea that you can be held morally to account for what you have done or will do is deprived of a solid foundation; the idea of individual moral responsibility seems to have been undermined.[18] Sorabji raises the stakes still further. He argues that a no-self theory also loses purchase on i) the idea that there can be compassion for the suffering of *others*; ii) the idea that one can intend now *oneself* to perform an action later; iii) the idea that one can be bound by a promise *one* has made in the past. Without compassion, the altruistic ethics to which Buddhism aspires is compromised; without intentions, actions and language do not have meaning; and without promises, there are no rights, duties, and responsibilities. Sorabji is surely right that much of our ordinary moral vocabulary presupposes that there are moral agents who are the enduring owners of their acts and intentions.[19]

I think the Buddhists will have to agree that the whole conceptual scheme of what we might call 'folk ethics' is interrelated with and dependent on

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[18] For example, Kumārila's *Ślokavārttika*, Ātmavāda 32–33; K. Sambasiva Sastri (ed.), *The Mīmāṃsāślokavārtika, with the Commentary Kāśikā of Suracitamiśra* (Trivandram: Trivandram Sanskrit Series, no. 90, 1926).

[19] Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern* Insights *about Individuality, Life and* Death (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), chapter 12. For related arguments, see Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

the notion of persisting selves. That leaves three possible strategies for the Buddhists, and I think they take advantage of all of them. If any one of these moves is successful, it will defuse the line of objection to the Buddhist view without itself constituting a positive reason in favour of that view. One move is to say that the resources of folk ethics, embedded as it is in most people's thinking, should be exploited in order to help improve their lives. In the *Lotus Sūtra*, the Buddha is reported to have illustrated the idea with the story of a father whose children are playing inside a house that has caught fire. In order to entice them to come out, he tells them that there are toys and sweets waiting for them if they do so, even though in reality there are none. Even false ideas can lead one to do what is right.

Another strategy is to seize the dilemma by its horns, and agree that the whole system of everyday ethical concepts is, ultimately, in need of repair. This is an idea that the Buddhist texts say is hard to grasp and easy to misinterpret, and that it requires a lot of preparatory work before one can understand it properly. One way to approach it, perhaps, is in comparison with the advice of the Stoics that one should aim to cultivate a 'view from above', or perhaps a 'view from nowhere', and to think about the whole world and all that goes on in it dispassionately and impartially. It is true that someone who manages to do that will not feel the force of individual moral responsibility to the same degree as before, but this does not mean that they will cease to be ethical. It is rather that their ethical concern will be for the whole, rather than for any one part, even the part that is themselves. And perhaps that is what the Buddhists have in mind when they speak about *karuṇā*, which would then not altogether happily be rendered by the English word 'compassion'. Someone who manages to free their thinking entirely of the notion of self and what depends on it will see the suffering in the world, and will judge that it would be better if there were less, without apportioning blame.[20]

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[20] On the possibility of an entirely self-free consciousness, see Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books, 2003), pp. 565–6. Metzinger's book is a defence of the thesis that 'there are no such things as selves'; there are only 'self-models' in the representational systems of organisms. Ownership, 'mineness', and subjectivity are likewise properties modelled by the system, phenomenal properties of a merely phenomenal self. He speaks to the argument from ethics only very briefly, stating that the representational systems are capable of conscious suffering, and affirming a negative utilitarian principle, that 'the overall amount of conscious suffering in all beings capable of conscious suffering should be minimized' (p. 570; his italics). It is not clear to me how he would answer Sorabji's criticism of that position.

A final possibility is that the illusion that there are selves should be regarded as having the same status as Kant's transcendental illusions of pure reason. Kant said that there are certain illusions which are inseparable from the use of reason, even after their deceptiveness has been exposed.[21] If the conviction that there are enduring selves is an illusion of that sort, then you can never fully escape from it, but you can become self-aware about the way it entraps your thinking, and you can adapt accordingly. In other words, it is a disease for which there is no cure but only an accommodation, and knowing it for what it is is the first step in learning how to live with it as best one can.

Being True to Your Individual Self

I have spoken about the pandemic illusions and about the benefits that accrue to those who achieve self-consciousness, and this is something that I will discuss again in Chapters 12 and 13. Where does that leave what Sorabji has called 'individual reasons', an individual reason being, roughly, a reason that bears on *that very* individual and on nobody else? Sorabji argues very convincingly that we should not treat individual reasons as special cases of general ones, even were it formally possible to do so. Even if anyone else like Cato should have done what he did, 'the morally interesting point about Cato is that there was nobody else like him.'[22] And how does it relate to the fact that everyone is presented with a range of 'identities', and to be an individual is to exercise one's right to choose which parts of one's overall identity to make one's own, that 'reason is before identity'; it is for me to choose what relative prominence to give to my class, gender, vocation, hobbies, religion, family, ethnicity and so on. We might say that the point is that there are more individual reasons than there are individuals, and so individual choices are still there to be made (as Arjuna discovered in the *Bhagavad-gītā,* one's *svadharma,* one's individual duties and responsibilities, doesn't deprive one of the freedom to make choices). Sorabji mentions Karṇa, a character in the *Mahābhārata* who chose to remain true to his exceptionally unusual ancestry and upbringing rather than to accept the kingdom and forestall the calamitous war. The important point about Sorabji's 'individual reasons' is that they do not merely explain why the individual acted in the way that he or she did, but rather that they provide the action with moral justification

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[21] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), A298/B355.

[22] Richard Sorabji, 'Self and Morality', *Antiqua Philosophia* 2 (2008), pp. 1–24.

(they are *normative* reasons and not merely *explanatory* reasons). The claim is that Cato was *right* to commit suicide, even if nobody else was; that Karṇa was *right* to forego the kingdom, even though the consequences were disastrous. The point is not simply that there is such a thing as being true to one's individual self. Rather, the argument must be that being true to one's individual self is a way to provide one's acts with moral sanction.

One of the stories about Karṇa does, I think, confirm that this idea is present in the *Mahābhārata*. Karṇa wanted to learn military skills, and in order to do so pretended to be a brahmin. When the deception was uncovered, his teacher told him that whatever skills he had learned would let him down when he most needed them; and that is indeed what happened, resulting in Karṇa's death in battle. This episode seems designed to inform us that in failing to be true to his individual self, Karṇa did something for which he would later pay the price. An interesting point is that Karṇa was also renowned for his exceptional generosity, that is, for his commitment to a recognised moral universal. Indeed, his generosity was often taken advantage of, something which caused him much suffering. So it seems to me that the story of Karṇa nicely demonstrates the existence of both the two questions in play, namely how to behave from an impartially rational perspective, and how to be behave in a way that is true to oneself. If the *Mahābhārata* is illustrative of anything, it is that circumstance rarely permits these two questions to receive a univocal answer. One's individuality and identity emerges in the way one balances their conflicting calls.

It does seem that the moral framework of the *Mahābhārata* allows for individual reasons. Here we find a direct connection between the ethics of that great epic 'Kasus' and the more theoretical writings I reviewed in Parts I and II of this book. Indeed, the Indian logicians discuss the general principles underlying the topic in great detail. Diṅnāga, the famous Buddhist logician, considers the possibility that one might draw inferences about the properties of a thing based on its unique characteristics. His example is: Sound is eternal because it is audible. He describes this as a logical fallacy, the fallacy of the 'specific indeterminate' (*asādhāraṇānaikāntika*).[23] His point is that you have no way of knowing whether audibility is a good sign of eternality or anything else, since you cannot observe it anywhere else or make inductions based on observable correlations. Likewise, Diṅnāga would ask: how do you know that Cato's unique individuality made it right, rather than wrong, for him to commit suicide? Precisely because his individual features are unique to him, there seems to be no way to answer the question. Other Indian theorists,

[23] Diṅnāga, *Pramāṇa-samuccaya-vṛtti*, Chapter 2.

however, were not quite convinced by Diṅnāga's argument. The Nyāya philosopher Uddyotakara thought that you could get a valid inference if you just turn things around. He used the idea to try to demonstrate the existence of the enduring self as follows: a living body is not without a self, because if it were it would be without life-breath. The point is that you can confirm empirically that things like stones, which do not have a self, also do not have life-breath, and Uddyotakara's claim is that such negative correlations are sufficient.[24] The logical dispute about the status of the so-called 'specific indeterminate' reason rumbled on and became very intricate in the work of later Buddhist and Nyāya philosophers, and attention shifted to the question of whether there can be 'inner' correlations (*antarvyāpti*) between the unique characteristics of something and its other properties. But perhaps one can get a sense from the application to Cato and Karṇa that there were real practical motivations behind all the abstruse theorising.

As the preceding discussion amply demonstrates, an individual identity is something whose formation contains within itself many strands and strata, and so is an achievement whose full acknowledgement demands considerable reflection and self-knowledge. Very often, however, individuals can and do slip into regarding their identities as brute givens rather than as products of their choices and reasoning in public and practical contexts. That is to say, people are prone to be in error about the constitutive nature of their identity. The risks involved have been well-described by Amartya Sen:

> There is something deeply debilitating about denying choice when choice exists, for it is an abdication of responsibility to consider and assess how one should think and what one should identify with. It is a way of falling prey to unreasoned shifts in alleged self-knowledge based on a false belief that one's identity is to be discovered and accepted rather than examined and scrutinized.[25]

The false idea that one's identity is simply a given is frequently used to defend regressive social practices, on the grounds that they are constitutive of the identity in question. In the next chapter I will begin to offer a diagnosis of how such errors come about, and an analysis of the place of reason in correcting them.

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[24] Uddyotakara, *Nyāya-vārttika* on *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.35.

[25] Amartya Sen, *Reason Before Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 21.

12

Identity and Illusions about the Self

Speaking about the Self

If one topic can be singled out as having fundamental importance in the long history of Indian philosophical thinking, it must surely be the topic of the true nature of the self. That this issue is seen as central to a range of ethical understandings and soteriological aspirations is, perhaps, evident even to the most casual observer of the Indian discussion. Less obvious is the way in which inquiry into the true nature of the self serves as the organisational centre in the development of a broader range of philosophical conceptions and approaches. In metaphysics and epistemology, in the philosophy of language as well as the philosophy of mind, sustained reflection on the nature of self functions as a paradigm for conceptual elaborations whose application has a significantly wider reach. In short, beginning with the most natural sense of wonder about who, why, and what we are, about where we are going, where we are from, and what we should value, there emerges in India philosophy in its most complete and articulated form. I have argued elsewhere that the investigation of the topic of self revolves around a pair of themes, the twin themes of truth and concealment.[1] If the truth about one's identity were not, in some way, opaque, if it were immediately evident, then there would simply be no substantive philosophical project of thinking about self. As I have shown in Chapters 10 and 11, we are persistently told by the Indian thinkers that

[1] See my *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), and for further discussion of Indian conceptions of self, my *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness and the First-Person Stance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

the truth about the self is something to be acquired only as the outcome of a lengthy procedure of conceptual examination, self-searching, 'spiritual exercise' and textual study.

Modern analyses of Indian philosophical literature have tended to underestimate the importance of the relation between literary form and philosophical argument; they have preferred instead to concentrate either on the systematicity of philosophical construction in India, or else on the history of Indian philosophical ideas.[2] One of my recommendations is that we give due weight to the importance of genre, narrative and literary form in understanding the philosophical ambitions of these authors. One reason for this is the rich use of the genres of dialogue and commentary, which bring into play all the possibilities for narrative embedding and authorial self-distancing that Indian literature in general makes so much use of. Another reason has to do with specific aspects of the subject matter under discussion. The possibility, certainly, is that knowledge of the true nature of self is non-discursive, and if this is so then the author of a text that claims to lead the audience to that knowledge has to use such narrative devices as will point his audience in the right direction, encouraging them to look or think in a certain way without the outcome being explicitly formulable in words. The author has to play a game with the listener. The Indian authors of these philosophical texts avail themselves of an astonishing range of narrative devices by means of which they hope to persuade a reader that the philosophical quest is indeed a quest worthy of pursuit and that there is something that will count as progress. So, for us, the form of the text is informative – informative as to the nature, value and ambition of philosophy itself, not least in relation to the formation of identity.

I begin by sketching in more detail how these themes are explored in Indian philosophical writing, here summarising the central theme of *The Concealed Art of the Soul*. Two streams of analysis are interwoven. One stream is an inspection of what might loosely and schematically be termed 'Hindu philosophy of self'; the other, equally schematically and imprecisely, 'Buddhist philosophy of no-self'. An analysis of Hindu theory might begin with the Upaniṣads, canonical statements of an ideal search for self as a philosophical programme. The texts portray the Upaniṣadic sage as someone possessed of a great reluctance to disclose the truth about the self, but this reluctance has more in common with

[2] The work of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan is representative of the first approach, and that of Erich Frauwallner the second.

Socratic irony than mere secretiveness – it is a device to encourage the pupil or reader to attach value to a question to which they might not have previously been inclined to value. The Upaniṣad, then, I suggest, is to be understood as a protreptic narrative, an exhortation to take philosophy (here understood in terms of a search for the truth about self) seriously. I suggest too that there is, in the Upaniṣads, a well-articulated conception of our shared identity.

The texts we now refer to as the dialogues of the Buddha are in fact compositions dating from some considerable time after the Buddha's death. We might certainly wonder how the character that is 'the Buddha' is constructed in these texts, and how readers of the texts, or listeners to them, are meant to hear and receive them. Again, I would argue that the texts are protreptic narratives, encouraging their readers to perform a certain kind of self-oriented examination. Not infrequently, the Buddha is represented as engaging in something less than straight-talking, giving voice to a view ostensibly his own but incompatible with his true beliefs; nowhere is this more especially so than in his teachings about the true nature of self. In pretending to advocate a view that is not his own, the Buddha is represented as one whose intention is not mere deception, any more than that of the Upaniṣadic sage was mere reluctance; once again, this is an 'ironic' deception with a protreptic import. The dialogues thereby force their readers to wonder why the truth is to be valued at all. We learn that for an inquiry into the truth to be valuable, it must be entered into for the right reasons, reasons that bear upon the moral progress of the inquirer. The point again is that an inquiry into the true nature of self is not a merely academic exercise but an attempt to free oneself through philosophy from conceptual error and what follows in its train.

Polestar and Compass: Two Modes of Practical Reason

Reason is intrinsically implicated in this depiction. For there is, the Indians say, an epistemology to error, a way of understanding how our errors work, and a hope, at least, that the world of error has within itself resources that might permit us with *reason* to lever ourselves out into the truth. The error is no passive mistake, it is not a lapse or an oversight or a blindness. This error belongs in the category of deceit, because like deceit it is a coin with two faces, concealing the truth by condoning the false, an active collusion rather than an act of omission. Thus Maṇḍanamiśra:

> This error has a double aspect, concealing the bright and projecting [an error].[3]

Lies are like this too; the liar promotes a falsehood even as he hides his own beliefs, in a characteristic synthesis of concealment and dissimulation. In his essay on lying, *De Mendacio*, Augustine says,

> Whence also the heart of him who lies is said to be double; that is, there is a double thought: the one, of that thing which he either knows or thinks to be true and does not produce; the other, of that thing which he produces instead thereof, knowing or thinking it to be false.[4]

The truth, we are told, is hidden behind a constructed falsehood, a projection for which you yourself are responsible. You deceive yourself into thinking that this projection is all there is, and so your false beliefs are more like lies than blunders.[5]

It is wrong to think that a victim of error has no hope of finding their own way out, that their only hope is to receive a 'helping hand' from without. There is room for what I have elsewhere called the idea of a procedural epistemology, the idea that even someone who is massively wrong has rational resources available to them with which they might *lever* themselves out of error.[6] Reason provides orientation in the space of errors,[7] and an important contrast here will be the contrast between orientation by polestar and

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[3] *Brahma-siddhi* 149.16: dviprakāreyam avidyā, prakāśācchādikā vikṣepikā ca.

[4] Augustine, *De Mendacio*, in his *Treatises on Various Subjects*, trans. Mary Sarah Muldowney et al. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press), §4, p. 833.

[5] Nietzsche understood this better than most, wondering how within the mire of self-deceit a 'will to truth' could possibly have arisen: 'Deception, flattering, lying, deluding, talking behind the back, putting up a false front, living in borrowed splendour, wearing a mask, hiding behind convention, playing a role for others and for oneself – in short, a continuous fluttering around the solitary flame of vanity – is so much the rule and the law among men that there is almost nothing which is less comprehensible than how an honest and pure drive for truth could have arisen among them.' Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Truth and Lies in the Non-Moral Sense', in Daniel Breazeale (ed. and trans.), *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1979), pp. 79–91.

[6] *The Concealed Art of the Soul*, chapter 5.

[7] On the relation between reason and orientation, see Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in Mary J. Gregor (ed.), *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 11–22.

orientation by compass. The truth-seeker believes that the truth will lead him out of error as if it is a bright light he must follow. This is the idea behind the soteriology of disclosure – each unveiling makes brighter the place in which you live, each shrouding darkens your life. But to orient oneself by the polestar implies that one is able see the polestar and go towards it, and so also implies that someone who is inside the error can still see through it to the outside. Orientation by polestar is the way ideals, recognised as such, function in the guidance of thought. Orientation by compass does not imply that, and so is the proper metaphor for the procedural use of reason. The compass tells us only in which direction to go from where you are; following a compass is a method that, if consistently followed, will lead you out of the fog. Orientation by compass is the way executable algorithms work in the guidance of thought. You are, these Indians might have said, more like the prisoner who, in Plato's allegory of the cave, has had his chains loosened but has not yet been led out of the cave.[8] It is not the bright light of the sun outside that is to be your guide, but that application of reason which enables you to see, for the first time, the shadows *as* shadows. They will agree with Plato when he says that the soul 'is not turned around the right way or looking where it should' (*Republic* 517d4), but they will insist that this 'turning around' or reorientation of the self cannot be the result of the self being 'led out' by education; rather, the self must turn itself around from within, for it is reason alone which gives orientation to a self. Śrīharṣa's arguments against directed seeking, reviewed in Chapter 9, are targeted most forcefully against the idea of what I am now calling orientation by polestar; they are apparently less telling against orientation by compass. Perhaps then it is this distinction between two concepts of orientation that is needed if one wants to respond to his critical programme.

The Ethics of Self-Deception and the Reach of Reason

In matters of identity, honesty with oneself is a cardinal moral and intellectual virtue. 'Error is not blindness,' said Nietzsche, 'error is cowardice', the measure of a person's worth being the amount of truth they dare to stand, truth especially about themselves. The unconditional will to truth is the will no longer to deceive ourselves with those cosy falsehoods and comforting lies we habitually believe.[9] Sissela Bok, in her study of the ethics

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[8] Plato, *Republic* 514a–521a.

[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. W. Kaufmann (Vintage: New York, 1967), p. 3.

of concealment, argues that attributions of self-deception are dangerous, if necessary, for they imply a denial of rationality to the one who is alleged to be self-deceiving.[10] What then are the criteria for attributing self-deception, and what are the criteria for judging it? When is self-deception a harm and when a benefit or even a vital necessity? The Upaniṣads speak of a self that is concealed, 'hidden in the cave.' Indeed, it is so well hidden that it is a secret even to itself. The 'Upaniṣad' as literary genre aims to instil in the reader a sense of secrecy and concealment, of there being something to which they are not privy, something exciting and wonderful. Slowly, reluctantly, we are let into the secret – that the self is deceived by its own desires, which cause it perpetually to look in the wrong place for itself; that the rediscovery of self is a reorientation of gaze. But the residual question remains: is the ecstatic feeling of relief that we are no longer the outsiders to a secret not in fact only a by-product of the instilled sense of secrecy, the artefact of a genre that works to cultivate in the audience a heightened sense of exclusion and loss? Could it be that the true experience of self, described as it is as a feeling of bliss and oneness, is, in fact, at one with the esoteric phenomenology of concealment and disclosure? Baladeva, the eighteenth-century follower of Caitanya, speaks of this phenomenology in his commentary on *Vedānta-sūtra* 1.1.3:

> Just as a man who thought that he was a pauper and so felt miserable, gets happiness when some trustworthy person tells him that there is a great hidden treasure in his house, and as the attainment of that treasure then becomes the object of his life, and as the information 'there is a treasure in your house' is not at all useless, so too is the case with the Vedānta texts. They certainly do not teach any action, but declare the highest truth, namely that there exists a being who is the supreme end of man, whose form is intelligence and inexhaustible bliss. . . .[11]

The interpretation of the Upaniṣads provided in the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta represents the hidden truth as consisting in a single great fact – that all is one, all is *brahman*. The senses deceive when they testify to a world of difference and differentiation, and the false world to which they testify

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[10] Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), pp. 64–5.

[11] *The Vedāntasūtras of Bādarāyaṇa with the commentary of Baladeva*, trans. Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu (Allahabad: The Pāṇiṇi Office, 1912), p. 18.

is discovered to be false by one who hears an oral recitation of Upaniṣadic text, speaking as it does of a hidden unity behind all appearance. But how can this be, given ex hypothesi that the structured Upaniṣadic texts too are just one more part of the great delusion they themselves are meant to dispel? How can you be lead out of a deception by that which is itself a part of the deceit? Apparently, you deceive yourself into thinking that you have a good reason for believing that the senses lie, and this self-deception successfully leads you to the truth! The startling idea is that the way out of colossal error is to embed within the illusion the catalyst of its own destruction. As I have put it elsewhere, the Upaniṣad is a 'trojan text,' a false gift that will blow up in the mind of its recipient, destroying the error of which it too is a part.

The idea of constructive deception is used to good effect in the protreptic discourses of the Buddha. The Buddha never tells his audience the truth in its naked form – he tells them a dressed-up truth, a massaged message that, if believed by them, will lead them in the direction of a reorientation of mind. There is, he therefore warns, a right way and a wrong way to grasp his teachings, just as there is a right and a wrong way to take hold of a snake. His teachings, he adds by way of clarification, are a raft, to be used in the 'crossing over' and then discarded. The Buddha also claimed that he always spoke openly, without any esoteric message –

> I have taught the Dhamma, Ānanda, making no [distinction between] 'inner' and 'outer': the Tathāgatha has not the closed fist of a teacher.[12]

And yet, as Milinda provocatively observes, it is quite hard to reconcile this assertion of openness with the Buddha's famous refusal, on one occasion,[13] to answer a series of questions put to him about the immortality of the soul and the eternality of the world.[14] In exercising his right to remain silent, does the Buddha not conceal the truth from us when in his judgement his teachings will not have the transformative effect intended for them? Clearly, the internal coherence of the Buddha's stance on silence requires that it is not zealotry but compassion which motivates him; his compassion is, as it were, a presupposition for, rather than a consequence

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12 *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* ii 102.

13 *Poṭṭhapāda-sūtra* 25.

14 *Milinda-pañhā* 4.2.4. Another example of Milinda's general argumentative strategy as discussed in Chapter 1.

of, the consistency of his revolutionary project. But what prior grounds do we, his audience, have for accepting this? Once again, the issue is the reach of reason, the extent to which reason is 'before identity', the cooperation between reason and deceit.

Although deception implies concealment, it does not follow that concealment implies deceit, any more than to remain silent is to lie, or to conceal one's body in clothes is to hide (Sanskrit terms for 'conceal' often also mean 'clothe' as well as 'hide', and are contrasted with words for falsehood and error). To clothe the world in concepts of our own making is not yet to screen the world entirely from view, in spite of what many modern writers on Buddhism have seemed to believe. For, as Bernard Williams succinctly remarks, 'It is trivially true that 'snake' is a human concept, a cultural product. But it is a much murkier proposition that its use somehow falsifies reality – that 'in itself' the world does not contain snakes, or indeed anything else you might mention.'[15] Some will argue that the world enclothed is still the world seen rightly – it is, in itself, a legitimate way of encountering the world. We shall then rightly speak of two *truths*, two levels of description or viewpoints on the world, one in which the world presents itself without concealment, in all its glory; the other in which it comes to us dressed-up (*saṃvṛta*).[16] Perhaps, indeed – and this is still a further move – the world dressed-up is the only world, and our self-deception consists in persuading ourselves to hope otherwise, to think that there is a more real world (or way of encountering the world) waiting to be laid bare. The 'way out' then is to give up the seductive but grandiose allure of disclosure, contenting ourselves with the world as we find it. Heidegger argues that what he calls 'deconcealment' is the essence of truth (*a-letheia*). Our 'dressed-up' truth is not the 'distortion' of which such a conception of truth is the counterpart, even if it too is 'something concealed but which is still in a certain way deconcealed'. For 'distortion' is a mode of untruth, whereas ours is categorically described as a variety of truth. Heidegger indeed relates unconcealment to the genealogy of Western philosophy:

> How and why this mode of untruth [viz. distortion] alone came into view, and to a certain extent was made into a problem, is no trivial

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[15] Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 17.

[16] I relate this point to the idea that objectivity in interpretation is positional or situated; see Chapter 14.

> matter, but is the ground of an innermost distress which the existence of man has had to bear ever since. This is what essentially determines the course and direction of the history of the Western spirit and its peoples. . . . History is nothing in itself, but exists precisely and only where something is manifest; its limit and definiteness is precisely the hidden.[17]

He might be right that ‘distortion’ as the solitary mode of untruth is the peculiar characteristic of Western intellectual history; in India, the varieties of concealment and modalities of untruth have a subtly different hue. For both, hiddenness in some form is a precondition in the exercise of reason upon identity.

Cognitive Stories

Let me introduce a last new idea, the idea of a ‘cognitive story’. This is the overall way an individual makes sense of their beliefs, the epistemological story they tell themselves about them. Such a story tells us to think in a certain way about the shape of our inner life: it is a story about the structure of our cognitive architecture. Observe that error potentially infects both ground-level belief and cognitive story. The truth that is concealed might be a truth about our understanding of the how, when, and why of believing itself, rather than a truth about the world as revealed in the content of those beliefs. Thus consider the Madhyamaka interpretation of the ‘two truths’. For them, the higher concealed truth is a truth about our beliefs, that they are empty of representational content – the only mistake you make is to attribute to your beliefs a role and function they do not have, namely representing and referring to the world. That points in the direction of a change in story and attitude, but not of outlook, as it would if you came to think that your ground-level beliefs were false. Contrast this with the Vedāntin who says that the higher and hidden truth is a substantive knowledge of an absolute unity. It is not easy to see how one could revise one’s attitude towards one’s beliefs to accommodate that discovery, all the while leaving the beliefs themselves intact. This all leads in the direction of an account of the attitude one has towards the goings-on

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[17] Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 105.

of one's own mind: ironic distance, revisionary intervention, suspension, reflective modification. That is why the problematic resolves itself into 'conceptions of the self', ways of understanding what makes you a unified and integrated focal point of belief. And that is why reason is always implicated in the choices you make about what and how to value.

In this chapter I have sought to demonstrate how reason must be seen to be implicated in the fashioning of identities that can be described as *authentic*, *genuine*, or *true*, how one of its duties is to dismantle the errors and illusions about self into which individuals are prone to fall. I have also shown that the Indian discussion reveals that one must take a sophisticated stance in one's understanding of the role of the text in such an exercise. Given the significance of this relationship between reader and text, it is only to be expected that literature, and especially fiction, will have much to contribute to the investigation of the topic. By way of a substantiation of this claim, I will look at one example of recent Indian fiction where the themes so far discussed are explored and extended with particular clarity and focus. The way the issues are tackled in modern fiction is also instructive insofar as it illustrates one important route by which the resources of India's past are appropriated and made available in modern lives.

13

'What You Are You Do Not See, What You See Is Your Shadow'

The Philosophical Double

Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali intellectual and Nobel laureate, lends me my title for this chapter, drawn from the eighteenth aphorism in his prose collection, *Stray Birds*. The self that I perceive, he says, is but a shadow of the self that I am. What is the meaning of this bifurcation, of this claim that there are two of me, one visible but less than fully real, the other real but hidden? It is easy enough, perhaps, to imagine that there is a deep self and an apparent self (or, as one might prefer to say, that there are deeper and more apparent parts or aspects of a self), but why should one think of the apparent self as *manifesting* the deep self, in the way that a shadow can be said to manifest the object that casts it?

One sort of answer might be derived from the following analysis of Socratic irony:

> Socrates splits himself into two, so that there are two Socrates: the Socrates who knows in advance how the discussion is going to end, and the Socrates who travels the entire dialectical path along with his interlocutor. Socrates' interlocutors do not know where he is leading them, and therein lies the irony. As he travels the path along with his interlocutors, Socrates constantly demands total agreement from them. He takes his partner's position as his starting point, and gradually makes him admit all the consequences of his position. . . . [T] he interlocutor, too, is cut in two: there is the interlocutor as he was before his conversation with Socrates, and there is the interlocutor

> who, in the course of their constant mutual accord, has identified himself with Socrates, and who henceforth will never be the same again. The absolutely essential point in this ironical method is the path which Socrates and his interlocutor travel together.[1]

Here are two Socratic selves: one embedded in the path, a companion and fellow traveller; the other outside, knowing where the path leads, wishing that with his help his accomplice might become wiser too. Surely, this is not an unfamiliar trope: I have found it in the figure of Vyāsa, the author of the *Mahābhārata* certainly, but also a character inside the text, rubbing shoulders with Arjuna and the rest, explaining to them what it is all about. Nor is it so different from that famous Upaniṣadic image of the two birds in a tree, one happily eating the fruit, the other looking on. We ought not say, however, that there are two Vyāsas, or two Socrates; there is one and his double, who is also he. Certainly, the Socrates who 'knows in advance' is, and has to be, invisible, not just to the traveller but to his embedded self as well. Or at least, the Socrates who 'travels the path' must give off that he is alone if he is to convince the other that their journey is the same.

A second answer flows from the thought that even as individuals are creatures with a time, a place, a history, still they are also cosmopolitan, impartial souls with a common identity. The co-existence of these two selves was explored by George Eliot in the figure of Daniel Deronda, who discovers only in adulthood his Jewish origins:

> It was as if he had found an added soul in finding his ancestry – his judgment no longer wandering in the mazes of impartial sympathy, but choosing, with the noble partiality which is man's best strength, the closer fellowship that makes sympathy practical – exchanging that bird's eye reasonableness which soars to avoid preference and loses all sense of quality, for the generous reasonableness of drawing shoulder to shoulder with men of like inheritance.[2]

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[1] Pierre Hadot, 'The Figure of Socrates', in his *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 153–4 ; reporting Otto Apelt, *Platonische Aufsätze* (Berlin 1912), pp. 96–108.

[2] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 745; taken from Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. xvii.

Two souls in one, and two identities – a human, universal one viewing the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, to which is added another, more partial, one, capable of entering into sympathetic relationships with those he now counts as fellows. The problem is to see how to do justice to the call of one without silencing the other; or, what amounts to the same, without splitting oneself into two. One thought, recalling my discussion at the end of Chapter 10, is that the presence of an impartial view enables the more embedded one to preserve a certain degree of 'aloofness' with respect to that newly found identity, not to be swallowed up by it. Thus undercut, it remains a somewhat shadowy expression of oneself.

The Double in Mauni's Fiction

The brilliant, terse, 'silent' Tamil writer Mauni exploits the trope of the double with astonishing dexterity in several of his short stories.[3] His characters are not double-faced, but genuinely double. In the background, to be sure, is an Indian philosophy of self according to which I am not really the one I take myself to be, driven by appetites and passions, thinking, talking and experiencing a multi-form world (see Chapters 10, 11 and 12). The one who is truly me stands in the wings, quiet, unmoved, and unnoticed. What Mauni explores is the *relationship* between these two. Naturally, the metaphor of the shadow comes readily to hand:

> Are all of us merely shadows? Of what, then, are we the moving shadows?[4]

Here we see a first difference from the ironic Socratic split. For there is no ironic pretence but a genuine separation, an obstruction preventing me from seeing myself. What I see is my shadow. No mere game now, this is a genuine metaphysical puzzle, and one of fundamental importance. The attractiveness of the metaphor of the shadow is that it establishes

[3] Mauni, *Fictions*, trans. Lakshmi Holmström (New Delhi: Katha, 1997). 'Mauni' – 'the silent one' – is the pen-name of S. Mani (1907–1985), a Tamil writer who lived in Kumakonam and Chidambaram, southern India. His entire literary production consists of just twenty-four short stories, fifteen of which were published before 1938. The four stories I will discuss all belong to a later period of creativity, between 1954 and 1971.

[4] Mauni, 'Undying Flame', in *Fictions*, trans. Lakshmi Holmström (New Delhi: Katha, 1997), p. 48.

a metaphysical asymmetry from the outset: the shadow depends for its existence on the more solid entity, but not vice versa. Although a shadow certainly has a life of its own (as the denizens in Plato's cave knew well), its place is always subservient and secondary.

Mauni explores the nature of the self and the role of choice in fashioning identity in four brilliant stories: 'From Death, Creation', 'Beyond Perception', 'Error' and 'Wasteland'. Before seeking a unifying theme, if there is one, it is best first to look hard at the particulars.

In order to live, must you destroy your past self? Or is it exactly the other way round, that in each moment you destroy your own future? In the story entitled 'From Death, Creation', one threesome is placed in correspondence with another. The first involves two men and a woman, journeying together by train, the older man and his younger wife having been joined at a certain point by a young fellow traveller. The second is the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva, the legend of whom is carefully interwoven into our own narrative. Brahma and Viṣṇu sleep, exhausted by their labours creating the world; while they do, Śiva destroys not only what has already been created but also everything that they *will* create in the future. Among our travelling threesome, it is the mature man, Subbayyar, who holds forth, recounting the Hindu myth, fetching food from the platform whenever the train pulls to a stop, assured, dynamic. Gauri, his wife, dozes and daydreams, while the younger man who has happened upon this couple is startled and silenced.

The story-teller leaves us in no doubt that the two men are doubles:

> By the way, I quite forgot to ask. What is your name?' Rising to his feet, the young man said, 'Subbu.' 'How strange! My own name! . . . It's as though we were the same person. Why, I must even have looked like you when I was younger.[5]

How uncanny that Mauni should have so nearly mirrored the Socratic triad mentioned above. A journey with two travelling companions; a third person, who is the double of one of them, somewhat removed and detached. And yet it is far from certain how the correspondences and mappings ought to work out. Who in our story would be the detached, impartial Socrates? The older man, who seems more knowing, dare one say more ironic, than the other two? Or is it the younger man, a quiet

[5] Mauni, 'From Death, Creation', in *Fictions*, trans. Lakshmi Holmström (New Delhi: Katha, 1997), pp. 83–4.

presence joining the couple but not quite one of them? We come against the same enigma when we try to correlate this travelling threesome with the Hindu trinity so carefully embedded in the story. Which one is meant to be Śiva, remaining awake while the other two sleep, and pre-destroying their future labours? Is it the young Subbu, watching the tense couple and knowing that he has preempted everything his later self will ever do? Is it that older self, sapping the creative energy of the younger two in a deliberate verbosity? Or is the odd one out Gauri herself, whose presence makes the other two behave in the odd way they do, unable to reach each other in a proper communication because of their rivalry?

It seems, we are informed, that Gauri was once betrothed to another man, again younger than Subbayar, whose name was Subbini. On one of his platform visits, her husband, Subbayar, thinks for a minute he has seen him. The creative potential that exists between Gauri and Subbayar's own young self is destroyed, the story seems to say, by the sheer fact of time. Subbayar should have been Subbini, should have been Subba. The lack of synchrony between him and his wife destroys whatever it is or was they could have been. There seems to be only one way out of such desparate tragedies that the passing of time creates, and that is if there is a final reconciliation in some point outside of time, a point represented in one tradition by the mocking Socrates and in another by the neuter *brahman*. As it is said so well in the Īśā Upaniṣad, 'Knowledge and ignorance – he who knows them both together passes beyond death by untruth, and by truth attains immortality.' From death, creation.

In 'Beyond Perception' the roles are reversed. There are now two women and a man. The man, leaving his wife Sushila at home in the village, is sojourning in the town, where he happens upon another woman whom he immediately recognises and accidentally – but correctly – calls 'Sushila'. He tries to explain away his gaffe:

> When you were little, you might have taken turns on the swing, pushing each other. The child on the swing would move at great speed past the other one pushing her. How strange that game would be if the child on the swing seemed one person at a distance, and quite another when seen close-up! In those days, the same swinging form used to appear to me in two different and alternating perspectives. But now, I seem to be using the same name for two different persons swinging by.[6]

[6] Mauni, 'Beyond Perception', in *Fictions*, trans. Lakshmi Holmström (New Delhi: Katha, 1997), p. 103.

In this delightful metaphor, the whole paradox of personal identity is precisely described, the puzzle of finding in the very changing flux of human behaviour, experience and trait, whatever it is that lends to a person their sense of being one and the same. The Sushila who lives in the town is unsure about her own true motives, and about whether some part of her is wanting to keep Sekaran from going home to his wife. She is unsure whether any of the dispositions, habits, or traits that she identifies herself with really are in any sense 'her':

> Was it not a terrible thing to separate a man from his wife? And for another woman to engineer it? Who was she? And could she do such a thing? What did it mean to speak of oneself, and of one's nature and character? Is it by their transformations and opposites, even through our denials and refusals, that what we know as 'I' and 'mine' reveal themselves as truth? If that is so, can these characteristics that we claim for ourselves be described as firm or steadfast? What are they, really? Sushila could not work it out. It seemed that a name intervened by accident and became the target for a number of attributes, roving without form or home, for these things called 'I' and 'my character' to pierce through and tunnel through.[7]

Sekaran is caught between two women, both called 'Sushila', both needing him in order to reach the other aspect of themselves. Of the Sushila who is at home in the village, well 'perhaps it is only when their husbands are out of sight and elsewhere, that women got some sort of pleasure in waiting for their return'.[8] As for the Sushila in town, she thinks, 'He has a wife who has the same name as I. Is it she that I am looking for in him?'[9] He, indeed, seems to be the cause of separation, the reason for the two women's distinctness. Again, what you think of as yourself is dissolved into something nebulous, accidental, or borrowed:

> She appeared to be womanhood itself. Do you know what fearful strength womanhood possesses? But, a woman, by the very fact of being so, must be a man's wife. And a husband tries to confine this huge notion of womanhood within the tight frame of a child's slate, and gives himself the pleasure of drawing a picture there, which he

[7] Ibid., pp. 106–7.
[8] Ibid., p. 108.
[9] Ibid.

> calls Wife. As for seeking the womanhood in her, that is a terrifying thing . . . .[10]

In this story, as in the first, one couple, in the shape of a wife and her man, is unsettled by another, that of a person with them. The interloper, in both cases, is but that person himself or herself, in another aspect, representing a self that they might have been or ought to have been. I find in both these stories the idea of a self in private conversation with itself, of a juxtaposition between two standpoints, one of which says to the other words to the effect, 'Why are you living this way, in these relationships, fulfilling these roles and functions, when you know that that is not who you are?' At the same time, however, the story seems to acknowledge that it is only a third party who provides the conduit through which one can reach that other self. Only through Gauri can Subbaya become Subba or Subbini; only through Sekaran can Sushila become Sushila. The troubling idea that one needs another to become oneself is what prevents self-seeking from collapse into a form of solipsism. A soul cannot see itself except as reflected in the soul of another. This may remind us of Plato's idea (*Alicibiades 1* 132E–113C) that 'with a soul too, if it is to know itself, it must look at a soul' just as to see one's own face one looks for its reflection in another's eye.

Here we see, I think, one dimension of the brilliance of Mauni as a philosopher. He is showing how the quest for self-fulfilment that is spoken about by the great Indian spiritual texts can be seen as a public, and not an egocentric, ambition. Finding oneself is always through another. Although it was Sakaran who abandoned the village for the city, it was his village wife, Sushila, who finds herself, through Sakaran, in her town counterpart. It is through Sakaran's eyes that the two Sushilas, the one swinging far in the distance, the other nearby, are seen as one. Freedom and rootedness are brought together in the external vision of the one who sees the continuity between the two. In both these stories, it is through another that one reaches oneself, coming to understand what characteristics of oneself are to be valued, and why.[11]

Self to Self

In his last stories, Mauni's use of the double has a minimalist, pared-down, quality. Dispensed with is the need for an intermediary third person, and

[10] Ibid., p. 100.

[11] Public and practical reasons are in this way intertwined.

so is the need for a diachronic separation between a younger and an older self. It is only because he is such a technically accomplished story writer that Mauni can achieve this degree of abstraction in the work. By the time of these stories, Mauni has extracted and separated off the puzzle of what makes a person the same in all the different states and stages of his or her life, a puzzle earlier explored in part by having a third person look upon the younger and older self. Now he focuses more sharply on the underlying and atemporal bifurcation, between seeing oneself as a practical subject, making decisions and commitments, inhabiting one's characteristics, and seeing oneself as an object of more impartial reflection and inspection. That is, the *integrity* of individuals, rather than their identity over time, comes to take centre stage.

The shifting fluidity and dreamlike quality of what one calls one's personality or character is evident in the disconcertingly ethereal story, 'Error'. A man sits in his room waiting for the arrival of an acquaintance he had happened to meet the previous day. Before the visitor has arrived, he decides to go out for a walk, but then finds it difficult to return:

> He wondered if he should return to his room. He thought his friend might already be sitting in his chair, in his very room, ready to upbraid him for his error, for making him wait although he had arrived at precisely the agreed time. He would not know what to say then. He gave up the thought of returning.[12]

Instead, he finds himself at the train terminus, a place where people set off in every direction and to which they return, where they 'leave behind their characters and details of their past natures', a place 'where transformations happen, sometimes in error'.[13] By chance he finds himself on a train, without a ticket. He gets off at a desolate station in the middle of the night. He thinks, 'Even when the basis is known, can such mistakes be avoided? Perhaps, only by perceiving the whole world as a place of transformations.' In the final paragraph of the story we are suddenly back at the beginning: a milk-woman arrives and knocks on the door of his room, but to no avail:

> He was lost in his dream world, itself the shadow of someone else's dream.[14]

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[12] Mauni, 'Error', in *Fictions*, trans. Lakshmi Holmström (New Delhi: Katha, 1997), p. 142.

[13] Ibid., p. 143.

[14] Ibid., p. 145.

What are we to make of this strangely amorphous and surreal story, in which there is hardly any narrative or even any characterisation? Perhaps without really leaving, he has left the other man sitting in his room while he goes on a journey, entirely by mistake, one which happens in a state of confusion and is also the result of a confusion. The journey that is a person's life, this story seems to say, can hardly be thought of as a progress or development in any way; rather, it is the illusion of a departure from a self left behind.[15] The decisions you make seem more like accidental happenings to you than things you choose do for yourself. One of the doubles seems to to engaged in practical reasoning and decision-making, going for a walk, getting on a train. But these 'doings' are not really of his doing, and he has left behind his other self, who silently upbraids him for this neglect. The boundary between one self and its double hovers, in this story, on the brink of dissolution without ever quite disappearing. It is an artificial creation, the reflection of a necessity in any act of self-transformation, to imagine one's new self as distinct from one's old one. In reality, it is, as Sushila speculates in 'Beyond Perception', only such imaginary separations which give one any sense of identity at all. One struggles to pull together all the ragbag of fragments and lend them some form of dignity, and that effort to 'bring together the foreshadowings of the future as well as the traces of memories long gone'[16] is all there is to this insubstantial, shadow-like, sense of self.

By the time we get to 'Wasteland', Mauni's last story, all extraneous detail has been dispensed with, and the trope of the double as shadow has been reduced to its most elemental form. A man is suddenly joined by a nameless companion whom he cannot shake off, no matter how much he roams about:

> What possible pleasure could there be in walking about the town like this? Yet they walked on and on like each other's shadows, changing places from time to time. When he looked at the man as if he were his shadow, suddenly another notion struck him. If thought alone could effect such a conclusion, how easily he might have given the other the slip and escaped! The very thought added a spring to his steps. He heard the other call out, 'What's the joke?' and calmed down a little. It had begun to dawn on him that the only way he

[15] For a cinematic study of the same idea, see Aki Kaurismäki's film *Pidä Huivista kiina, Tatjana* (*Mind Your Headscarf, Tatiana*).

[16] 'Error', p. 140.

> could release himself from the shadow that was dogging him was actually by becoming the other man. . . .[17]

Finding himself in a cremation ground, it comes to seem to him as if not just he but everything there has a shadow or is the shadow of something else. The clarity for this new thought comes from the light given out by a corpse on fire:

> Everything had begun to look like a kind of joke – the cremation ground, the burning corpse, the great tree ahead; all this in the spreading wasteland. But the more he thought, and the more he gazed, each thing seemed to reveal itself as something else, this the shadow of that, that of this. Seen in the light of the burning corpse, all things seemed like a joke, nothing containing anything.[18]

Meanwhile his double, it seems, has finally become fatigued; but this too is only an appearance:

> He could see that the other was exhausted to the point of dropping off. Suddenly he seemed to vanish and then reappear at his side, only to fall to the ground beside him. In a second he realized he had been tricked. The other had swallowed his shadow. Sheer terror! His mind was swamped by sheer terror! As he saw a crazed smile on the man's face, his fear grew worse – if that were possible. With a great wearying of spirit he awoke to the realization that holding on to the body is nothing but an endless addiction.[19]

To lose one's shadow is clearly a fatal mishap, but what if one's shadow is stolen from one by one's own double? To say that is to imply that the trick is one which one has played upon oneself. And have we not already been told that the way to shake off the unwelcome companion is to become the other man? In this story and the last, Mauni's use of the third-person pronoun, 'he', is very slippery. One is left unsure which of the two men is meant to be denoted. Here, indeed, with the swapping and exchanging of identities, with each as the shadow of the other, one cannot be sure who is

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[17] Mauni, 'Wasteland', in *Fictions*, trans. Lakshmi Holmström (New Delhi: Katha, 1997), p. 152.

[18] Ibid., p. 154.

[19] Ibid., p. 155.

who and who does what. In becoming one's own shadow, and in then swallowing up that shadow who is also oneself, one is engaging in a process of self-dissolution and self-destruction, breaking down the boundaries and lines that delineate, however ethereally, one's very self. And to do that is only to acknowledge, with a laugh, that there was nothing very substantial there in the first place.

While all the four stories investigate the nature of selfhood through the trope of the double, the first two have ingredients that are dispensed with in the more minimalist later narratives, where there is no bridging third person, and no appearance of a dialogue between an earlier and a later self. In these later stories, the double enters the narrative with no name, no age, indeed, no personality or distinguishing characteristics whatsoever.

Inhabiting an Identity

The narrative device of the double has been used to brilliant effect by Jorge Luis Borges in his story 'The Circular Ruins'.[20] There the struggle to invoke another's existence is taken quite literally: the main character summons up another in an act of magical creation, and since they are, after all, one and the same, he must be a magical creation too, the 'shadow of someone else's dream'. Personal identity is manufactured *ex nihilo* – that is what this story seems to be telling us. It so happens that a friend of Mauni cut out 'The Circular Ruins' and sent it to him in the post, and Borges became a favourite of his (as we hear in such echoing phrases as the one just quoted). Mauni, however, gives the trope a distinctively Indian twist: the identity that exists between the two halves of the double is made to stand for a more fundamental metaphysical identity between selves. And, as we have seen, Mauni sometimes complicated the trope in another direction, introducing a third character who witnesses the two members of the double, who constructs their identity in her gaze, and who can, in her reflections, comment on its significance.

One of the strongest philosophical themes to emerge from Mauni's use of the double has to do with the individuation of selves: the sources of identity for a single self in projecting itself into the future or attempting to assimilate a past. In particular, what is being explored is the existence of a tension at the heart of our sense of self, which derives from the fact that I must hide from myself the knowledge that my 'character' or 'self' is one I have fashioned for myself. For this invented persona does not serve as a character unless I really inhabit it and believe myself to be it; the moment I begin to look down

[20] Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Penguin Press, 1998), pp. 96–100.

upon it from the outside, to reflect on its origins in my own choices, it ceases to lend me an identity at all. The dual nature of our self-regard is explored by Sartre in connection with the paradox of binding oneself by one's own resolutions, for instance, a resolution to give up gambling:

> The resolution is still me to the extent that I realize constantly my identity with myself across the temporal flux, but it is no longer me – due to the fact that it has become an object for my consciousness. . . . It seemed to me that I had established a real barrier between gambling and myself, and now I suddenly perceive that my former understanding of the situation is no more than a memory of an idea, a memory of a feeling. In order for it to come to my aid once more, I must remake it ex nihilo and freely.[21]

'How,' asked Sushila, 'can these characteristics that you claim for yourself be described as firm or steadfast?'[22] given that it is always possible for you to see them as external elements and artefacts? How do you retain an internal relationship with your past resolutions and decisions? In the end, the sum of all these 'characteristics' constitutes only a shadow that follows you around and is hard to shake off. The double is a mocking presence, reminding you that all the attributes you ascribe to yourself and which give your sense of self its necessary robustness are really quite hollow. No wonder it is a joke, no wonder the double is so often described by Mauni as smiling a little sarcastically. After all, isn't there sarcasm too in the 'embedded' Socrates, ironically pretending to be one of us? For all your efforts to identify yourself with your future plans, or to see what has happened to you in the past as shaping you, there is no escape from the ever-present and unsettlingly ironic smile. The dissonance between Subbayyar and Subbu, or between the town Sushila and her married namesake in the village, is a reminder of how uncomfortable one is with one's past or future self. But, as the final two stories show, no escape from this is to be found by seeking to remain wholly in the present. The dissonance is not, at bottom, a temporal one. It is rooted in the conflict between the irrepressible need to believe that one is the person one seems to be and the certain knowledge that one is

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[21] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (Washington Square Press, 1956), p. 70.

[22] 'Beyond Perception', p. 107.

not, to hide from oneself the fact that one's identity is a product of one's own reasoned choices.

Mauni's fiction represents one way in which modern identities are brokered through an engagement with India's past. In the next section of this book I will investigate the mechanisms by which this takes place

14

Interpreting Intellectual India

Questions of Method

Each of the disciplines that collectively make up the intellectual culture of India has at least this in common with the others: it takes the truth to be a regulative goal. In astronomy or grammar, ritual science, poetics, or jurisprudence, the internal measure of worth is the assessed likelihood of being true. Fidelity to tradition was, to be sure, highly prized, but the value accorded to that fidelity was in the first instance instrumental: a respect for the accumulated wisdom of the culture was seen to be a sensible policy in one's quest for truth in the field of one's inquiry. The philosophers, too, had truths of their own of which they were in pursuit, the truths of metaphysics, ethics and the various branches of philosophical knowledge. But the greater part of their intellectual endeavour, the part which is called *pramāṇa-śāstra*, was an inquiry rather into the general form any truth-oriented intellectual practice must take. How is a practice which is self-consciously governed by the regulative goal of truth to proceed, and what are the intellectual virtues which its participants must possess? Accuracy in the accumulation of information, caution in the interpolation and extrapolation of conclusions, due care with the application of terms of art and theory, and trustworthiness in the transmission and spread of information within the intellectual community – these four *pramāṇa*s stand out as the cardinal virtues, the so-called 'virtues of truth.'[1] The philosophers produced in theory an account of what others exemplified in practice, a theory of intellectual discipline.

[1] In Sanskrit: *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, *upamāna* and *śabda*.

The modern intellectual who attempts an engagement with the work of pre-modern Indian cultures of reason must perforce address a number of questions about method. Although strongly interrelated, I will for the sake of convenience classify them as questions of *motivation*, questions of *objectivity* and questions of *critical engagement*. 'Motivation' refers to the intended significance and purpose of the proposed examination, and here the sharpest distinction is the one between the investigator who has no expectation of being substantively informed about the subject matter of the intellectual discipline under investigation, and the investigator who does indeed anticipate that the investigation will result in substantive education. The intellectual historian of the Indian astronomical sciences may expect little that would constitute an enrichment of contemporary astronomical theory; this will not form part of a conception of the purpose of the investigation. On the other hand, the investigator of Indian philosophy typically will, I believe, expect the Indian discussion to be of substantive philosophical interest. In particular, there seems to be no antecedent reason that might rule out the possibility that the Indian inquiry into the nature of truth-governed intellectual discipline will inform the contemporary investigator's conception of the structure of intellectual practices, including the practice in which they themselves participate. Their identity as inquirers, it might be said, is shaped by the nature of the inquiry itself.

Objectivity

What does the demand for objectivity require of the intellectual engaging with Indian cultures of reason? That question cannot be treated independently from the question of motivation: what counts as objective in interpretation must depend on the purpose the interpretation is intended to serve. Little remains now of the nineteenth-century conception of the requirements of objectivity as calling for a complete elimination of interest or perspective. Even an investigation that conceives of itself as the mere chronicling of facts presumes a deliberate selection of facts deemed to be worth chronicling, and there are many difficulties with the supposed distinction between matters of fact and matters of theory, well attested in work on empiricist philosophy of science (for example, the Duhem-Quine thesis). It is a good question, and one indeed which the contemporary intellectual historian of the Indian systems profitably addresses, to ask after the Indians' own conception of the requirements and burdens of objectivity, both in theory and in practice. Comparable studies are now being done of the origins of a distinctive conception of objectivity and

objective inquiry in seventeenth-century European thought, for instance, in the thought of Francis Bacon.[2] An important resource for the contemporary intellectual is Amartya Sen's elaboration of the idea of 'positional objectivity', outlined in his Abha Maiti Memorial Lecture 'Interpreting India's Past',[3] and developed more fully in a series of articles published in his book *Rationality and Freedom*.[4] Sen argues that an objective assessment of India's past does not require that the interpreter seek (vainly) to assume what Thomas Nagel has called the 'view from nowhere'.[5] There is, he claims, a clear sense in which situated interpretations – views from somewhere – achieve objectivity. To give a simple analogy, an observation that the sun and moon appear the same size is objective (that is, true for any observer positioned on the earth's surface, irrespective of subjective differences between observers), but positional (dependent on the observer's having a certain spatial location). Such observations have a legitimate place in geocentric observational astronomy. Sen cites as an example the interpretation of India's intellectual past advanced by the Indian nationalist movement, which was, as is well known, selective in its choice of materials and single-minded in the use to which it put them. In particular, he argues, it was reasonable for the Indian nationalists to give weight to themes of synthesis and convergence in Indian intellectual history, given the colonial use of supposed communal and ideological discord as a justification for the super-imposition of colonial rule. Sen's idea, I take it, is that the description of the 'facts to be explained' by a theory depends on the spatial, social, or cultural position of the theorist, in ways that are not accountable for simply in terms of a notion of subjective bias. The practical reasonableness of such an interpretation, the fact that it is, as we might say, what *anyone* would think in those circumstances and presented with that data, commends the interpretation as an objective one, albeit positionally objective. And so,

> The interpretation of India's past cannot but be sensitive to the concerns of today. Our identities cannot be defined independently of our

[2] Julie Robin Solomon, *Objectivity in the Making: Francis Bacon and the Politics of Inquiry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

[3] Amartya Sen, *On Interpreting India's Past* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1996).

[4] Amartya Sen, 'Positional Objectivity', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22 (1993), pp. 126–45. Reprinted in *Rationality and Freedom* (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2002), pp. 463–83.

[5] Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

> traditions and past, but this does not indicate a linear sequence whereby we interpret our past first, and then arrive at our identity, equipped to face contemporary issues. On the contrary, our reading of the past and understanding of the present are interdependent, and the selectional criteria that are central to interpreting the past have to take note of the relevance of the different concerns in the contemporary world. While we cannot live without our past, we need not live within it either.[6]

It is important, of course, not to confuse the objectivity of an interpretation with its truth; a perfectly reasonable interpretation of the available data might, nevertheless, be false. Positionalism in objectivity does not entail relativism in truth. There are, moreover, positionally objective illusions, such as the appearance to any suitably located observer of a half-submerged stick as bent; not to see the stick as bent could only be explained with reference to subjective anomaly.

Here it would seem that the contemporary intellectual profitably seeks to establish the Indian philosophical self-conception of the requirements of objectivity in a pluralistic intellectual milieu, when all interpretation is situated interpretation, and the motivation for such an inquiry would consist in part in the fact that we ourselves are situated interpreters. A further theoretical resource we might draw upon here is the important study of truth-oriented practices by Bernard Williams, in his book *Truth and Truthfulness*.[7] Williams recommends what he calls a method of 'vindicatory genealogy'. A vindicatory genealogy has two parts. One part derives from an imaginary State of Nature story a functional account of the virtues and values associated with truth-governed practices in terms of an inevitable or very probable development of purely 'human needs, concerns, and interests' (e.g. cooperation in the pooling of information requires members of the community to be largely accurate and sincere). The second part speaks of the development of those virtues in ways that situate them in a larger matrix of value, a process of development that is contingent and historical, and confers upon the values an intrinsic worth in the intellectual community which endorses them. The aim of a vindicatory genealogy, in other words, is to give a non-reductive explanation of the intellectual virtues, and the form the explanation takes is that of an imaginary history, which displays the utility of the virtue to a population not yet possessing it, and shows how,

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[6] Amartya Sen, *On Interpreting India's Past, p. 38.*

[7] Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

once introduced, it achieves what Williams calls 'stability under reflection' within a larger array of interrelated values. Stability under reflection requires that 'the agent has some materials in terms of which he can understand this value in relation to other values he holds, and this implies, in turn, that the intrinsic good, or rather the agent's relation to it, has an inner structure in terms of which it can be related to other goods' (p. 92). It is a consequence of Williams' view that intellectual virtues have histories:

> For us to get clear about trustworthiness as an intrinsic good, we need to answer two kinds of question. First, we have to decide what disposition or set of dispositions trustworthiness is; as we might also say, what it needs to be. . . . Second, we have to see what those other values may be that surround trustworthiness, values that provide the structure in terms of which it can be reflectively understood. . . . That [structure] has been differently understood in differing cultural circumstances. Everywhere, trustworthiness and its more particular applications such as that which concerns us, sincerity, have a broadly similar content – we know what we are talking about – and everywhere, it has to be related, psychologically, socially, and ethically, to some wider range of values. What those values are, however, varies from time to time and culture to culture, and the various versions cannot be discovered by general reflection. . . . Sincerity has a history, and it is the deposit of this history that we encounter in thinking about the virtues of truth in our own life. This is why at a certain point philosophy needs to make way for history, or, as I prefer to say, to involve itself in it (pp. 92–3).

This then is one constructive proposal for how an investigation into truth-directed practices can affirm the situatedness of both the practitioners and the investigators, through an acknowledgement that there is always a story to be told, in any particular cultural circumstance, about how an attachment to an intellectual virtue is sustained and manifested; and, indeed, that it is in telling that story that the intrinsic worth of the virtue is displayed as internally intelligible and so 'vindicated'. (The contrast is with the 'vindictive' genealogies of Nietzsche, which aimed to expose the 'sordid origins' of Christian morality.)

Williams' account helps us to make sense of the idea that the intellectual virtues are simultaneously objective goods and positioned goods. It is interesting to find in the *Śāntiparvan* Yudhiṣṭhira asking precisely the two questions Williams says need to be asked, and to hear Bhīṣma answering

by situating the value in question (here truth) within a framework of values and emotions that help to make sense of it as something of worth:

> Yudhiṣṭhira said, 'When it comes to morality, the gods, the fathers and the sages all commend truth. I want to learn about truth – tell me about it, O Grandfather. What is the indicating mark of truth, O King, and how is it to be secured? What might truth obtain, and how? Tell me this.' Bhīṣma said, 'For the good, truth is always morally right, truth is the morality constant for all (*sanātana*). One ought submit oneself to truth alone, for truth is the highest path. Moral duty is truth, as is austerity (*tapas*) and mental discipline (*yoga*); brahman is truth, constant for all. Truth, it is said, is a high ritual. On truth, everything stands. Having spoken thus of the customary forms of truth, I will now describe in sequence its indicating marks. And you must also hear about how truth is secured. Bhārata, among all people, truth is of thirteen kinds. Without doubt, truth is impartiality indeed, as well as self-control; it is freedom-from-envy, toleration, modesty, patience and freedom-from-spite; it is renunciation, contemplation, nobility, steadiness, perpetual calmness and non-violence – these, O King, are the thirteen aspects of truth. Truth is thus indeed imperishable, eternal and unchanging. Not in conflict with any moral duty, it is secured by means of mental discipline (*yoga*).' (*Mahābhārata* 12.156.3–10).

The pursuit of truth is made sense of in the *Śāntiparvan* within a framework of virtues that puts great weight on steadiness of mind. The steady mind is the one that will be unbiased by its own needs. Sincerity is related to the idea that one should not use words to inflict 'harm' on others, where this means not doing something that would, precisely, threaten another's hold on the truth.

Michel Foucault advanced as a meta-methodological principle that the specific methods of investigation into some aspect of a system of thought must be constructed anew each time, tailored to the particular object of study (as we saw in Chapter 4, Aristotle similarly used the image of a flexible ruler used to measure the varying shapes of fluted columns). There is no overarching single correct methodology in the human sciences. For the investigator of the *pramāṇa-śāstra*, the application of this important idea is complicated by the fact that the object of study is itself a methodology of inquiry. To what extent should the inquirer into the *pramāṇa-śāstra* permit their investigations into that methodology to affect the methods

being employed to study it? This is one aspect of the third question I have itemised, the question of critical engagement. At the very least, the great sophistication of the Indian theory implies that it would be incautious not to be willing to learn from their methodological investigations, when so much attention had been paid to the problem of intellectual practice in a pluralistic intellectual environment. (This is particularly so if the interpretations are perforce situated, and their objectivity positional.) More strongly, however, one might argue that the methods of investigation into the intellectual world of a culture must draw upon the conception of reasoned inquiry articulated by that culture itself, that the critical apparatus and standards of evaluation should be immersed rather than external. Let me call this the 'immersion thesis'. Whether or not it is true, what seems clear is that this is a central question for any reflection on the methods of study in the intellectual history of India.[8] Part of the answer, however, seems to me to rest in the notion of participation. To the extent that the interpreter of Indian intellectual history is a participant in an extended intellectual community, it is appropriate to draw upon the critical resources of the culture itself. Philosophy, I have argued, is a special case, for here the boundary between subject and object of study begins to dissolve, and the investigator is of necessity more conversation partner than observer.

Immersion

I will pursue the question of immersion by way of an examination of John Newman's important discussion of the problem of development within a tradition.[9] Newman's analysis provides the contemporary interpreter with a flexible account of the distinction between development and corruption within a tradition, and might also be seen as the beginnings of a theory of 'immersed' rational interpretation. A recent commentator has said of Newman's account that 'although specifically dealing with theology and the Church, Newman's essay is a profound analysis of the continuity through discontinuity present in any long-lasting tradition, with implications for any field of human endeavour which manifests creative interplay between inherited tradition, rational reflection, and the wider social circumstances

[8] For an endorsement of the thesis, see Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, 'Internal Criticism and Indian Rational Traditions', in Michael Krauz (ed.), *Relativism* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press 1989), pp. 299–325.

[9] J. H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845; reprinted London: Longmans Green, 1890).

in which it is located. . . . Newman shows that the success of a tradition is related to its ability to assimilate new data, while conserving its past principles and achievements, and also to its ability to develop complex sequences of thought and practice while anticipating future development. He brings to the study of tradition a subtlety and a comparative perspective often lacking in the blanket statements of self-professed traditionalists and anti-traditionalists alike.' Newman conceives of the development and corruption of Christian doctrine as akin to the growth and decay of a living body. Just as, in the case of a body, there is a 'process towards perfection' followed by 'the reversal and undoing of what went before', where 'till this point of regression is reached, the body has a function of its own, and a direction and aim in its action, and a nature with laws', so too one may 'discriminate healthy developments of an idea from its state of corruption and decay' (p. 171). The marks of a healthy development are summarised as follows:

> There is no corruption if [the idea] retains one and the same type, the same principles, the same organisation; if its beginnings anticipate its subsequent phases, and its later phenomena protect and subserve its earlier; if it has a power of assimilation and revival, and a vigorous action from first to last. (p. 171)

By the 'type' of an idea is meant something that underlies whatever the particular form in which the idea finds expression. Newman comments, on the one hand, that 'ideas may remain, when the expression of them is indefinitely varied,' and, on the other, that 'one cause of corruption in religion is the refusal to follow the course of doctrine as it moves on, and an obstinacy in the notions of the past' (pp. 176–7). This amounts to an important criticism of fundamentalist readings of tradition – the ossification of an idea is the sign of unhealth and decay. Fidelity to a religious belief implies an acknowledgement of its underlying idea, but this is in no way antithetical to a respect for ways in which the articulation or 'external image' of the idea can change. How we identity the underlying 'type' of an idea is a problem of epistemology Newman does not explicitly address, but it is certainly consistent with his position that the later developments of the idea are in fact our best evidence for the underlying type, and that would point to a second reason why fundamentalism is mistaken – the original expression of an idea might be a comparatively poor indication of its true form.

Newman's idea that a vital tradition anticipates its own future development is extremely insightful. He says:

> Since, when an idea is living, that is, influential and effective, it is sure to develop according to its own nature, and the tendencies, which are carried out on the long run, may under favourable circumstances show themselves early as well as late, and since logic is the same in all ages, instances of a development which is to come, though vague and isolated, may occur from the very first, though a lapse of time be necessary to bring them to perfection . . . and it is in no wise strange that here and there definite specimens of advanced teaching should very early occur, which in the historical course are not found till a late day. (pp. 195–6)

If the genuine development of a tradition consists in the 'perfection' of its underlying idea and its principles, and if the possibility of such a perfection has existed from the first, then we might well expect to find, albeit in an inchoate and undeveloped form, anticipations of such later developments in the earlier strata of the tradition. On the other hand, of a shift in the tradition which is not a fulfilment of its underlying idea, there will be no antecedent anticipation. This idea provides a powerful rationale for a strategy of legitimisation which is prominent in the Indian literature: a later author will justify an innovation by seeking to demonstrate that the new idea was anticipated in the earlier literature, for example by referring to a sūtra as a 'proof text.' The strategy is evident, for example, in the work of early modern thinkers in India, where some of the followers of the innovative thinker Raghunātha wrote commentaries on earlier Nyāya works, including even the *Nyāya-sūtra*, with the explicit intent of showing that Raghunātha's ideas were the perfection of doctrinal implications already implicit in and anticipated by the earliest texts. This, indeed, is an interesting indication of a concern to demonstrate a compatibility between Raghunātha and the tradition, and so to consolidate the entitlement of his school.[10]

Finally, according to Newman, it is the very essence of a healthy tradition that it has the ability to absorb new ideas from *outside* itself. He says:

> [M]athematical and other abstract creations . . . are solitary and self-dependent; but doctrines and views which relate to man are not placed in a void, but in the crowded world, and make way for themselves by interpenetration, and develop by absorption. Facts and

[10] See my *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700* CE (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 77.

> opinions, which have hitherto been regarded in other relations and grouped round other centres, henceforth are gradually attracted to new influence and subjected to a new sovereign. They are modified, laid down afresh, thrust aside, as the case may be. A new element of order and composition has come among them; and its life is proved by this capacity of expansion, without disarrangement or dissolution. An eclectic, conservative, assimilating, healing, moulding process, a unitive power, is of the essence . . . of a faithful development. (p. 186)

And again,

> The stronger and more living is an idea, that is, the more powerful hold it exercises on the minds of men, the more able is it to dispense with safeguards, and trust itself against the danger of corruption. As strong frames exult in their agility, and healthy constitutions throw off ailments, so parties and schools that live can afford to be rash, and will sometimes be betrayed into extravagances, yet are brought right by their inherent vigour. (pp. 188–9)

These are among the finest statements in Newman's work. Healthy cultures are not insular; rather, they are able to absorb, modify and assimilate external influences. The reason is surety in their inner principles, which are then brought into relationship with ideas from outside the culture. Outside influences do not corrupt a healthy culture but rather assist it in its development: 'That an idea more readily coalesces with these ideas than with those does not show that it has been unduly influenced, that is, corrupted by them, but that it has an antecedent affinity with them' (p. 187). A healthy culture finds in the wider cultural environment a rich source of nutrition, from which it draws strength in the process of perfecting its internal principles. A development, then, in Newman's account, is a change in the body of the tradition that can be seen as following logically from the tradition's fundamental principles, even if it is not brought about by causes internal to the tradition; it is a change consistent with those principles, and a fuller expression and articulation of them.

I find resonances between Newman's discussion and the description of truth-oriented practices I described in Part I, with its emphasis on the place of established background principles (*siddhānta*) and paradigmatic examples (*dṛṣṭānta*), as well as its use of suppositional reasoning (*tarka*) from hypothetical premises. These all seem to me to be an acknowledgement that truth-seeking practices are situated or positional, that such practices achieve objectivity though, or through, having cultural and historical location. I

also find in Newman's suggestion that a vital culture can absorb influences from outside itself, when those influences are consistent with its own internal principles, a constructive answer to the question of critical engagement.

To return to the case in hand, consider some of the studies of Indian intellectual culture produced by a modern interpreter; let us take a book entitled *Perception,* the classic work of Bimal Krishna Matilal, about whom I will say more in the next chapter. The context of *utterance* of this study is clearly the contemporary community of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy. This is evident from a number of facts: the study is written in English; it uses the jargon of that culture; it makes constant references to the leading participants of analytical philosophy; and is even dedicated to two of them. The context of *evaluation*, equally clearly, is the intellectual culture of classical India, for it is that culture with respect to which the truth or falsity of specific utterances are to be evaluated. I do not see why we should not try to analyse the illocutionary force of the publication of *Perception*, but if we do so, it is clear that the performance essentially involves two contexts, not one, which is just to say that it is a situated act. I believe that Matilal's willingness to participate in illocutionary acts of this kind reveals his deep *immersion* within the Indian intellectual cultures. That might sound paradoxical: how can writing in the style of anglophone analytical philosophy be an expression of immersion in Indian philosophical culture? The answer is that Matilal was simply responding to an obvious but inescapable historical fact, the brute fact of colonialism. The immense rupture that colonialism represents left Indian intellectuals inhabiting an anglophone intellectual culture, being taught in English-style university systems, writing in English, publishing monographs and articles rather than *bhāṣya*s and *kroḍhapatra*s. How, then, to construct a bridge that could span the rupture? How is a post-colonial Indian intellectual like Matilal to engage with pre-colonial Indian intellectual culture? But this, after all, presents no great *new* problem. For Mīmāṃsakas were struggling to make sense of a ritual world-view that had long since lost social vitality, while a post-Diṅnāga author like Uddyotakara has to find a way to re-appropriate the sūtras of Nyāya in a new intellectual culture inaugurated by the emergence of Buddhism in Sanskrit.[11] Jumping back across the rupture, while continuing to be indelibly marked by it, reconceptualising the pre-rupture past in the categories of a post-rupture present – these are among the most characteristic hallmarks

[11] 'In order to abolish the errors of the false reasoners [*sc.* Buddhists], I will prepare a description of that śāstra which the best of sages, Akṣapāda, articulated for the peace of the world' (yad akṣapādaḥ pravaro munīnāṃ śamāya śāstraṃ jagato jagāda | kutārkikājñānanivṛttihetuḥ kariṣyate tasya mayā nibandhaḥ ||); *Nyāya-vārttika* 1, 3–4.

of Indian intellectual practice. For this reason, I say that a work like Matilal's expresses far more profound continuities with the underlying principles of Indian cultures than the visible discontinuities would suggest.

I conclude with a comment J. L. Mehta made in reference to contemporary reading of the Ṛgveda:

> Though we are separated from the Ṛgveda by a vast abyss of time, during which our cultural spiritual world has altered several times over, and though we are now estranged from the language of the Veda by the emergence and long dominance of classical Sanskrit, we can take comfort and encouragement from the fact that such alienation is also an enabling condition for a re-appropriation of what was once said in the remote past, that the passage of time leads not just to a forgetting but can also mean a conservation, a keeping in reserve, in which time functions as a filter through which the message may reach us in a novel, perhaps in a more purified sense'.[12]

This is, I have argued, a deeply Indian hermeneutical stance, the stance of a situated interpreter.

My proposals in this chapter have been, first, that the requirement of objectivity in interpretation is that the situated interpreter achieves positional objectivity in his or her interpretations, and, second, that immersed interpretation is positionally objective to the extent that the interpreter's situation is one of participation rather than observation. I have suggested further that the contemporary intellectual engaging with India's philosophical cultures is situated within a tradition of inquiry into the form of truth-governed intellectual practices; that is, he or she is a participant to the Indian intellectual cultures. It is to a further analysis of the significance of one exemplary contemporary Indian intellectual that I now turn.

[12] J. L. Mehta, 'The Ṛgveda: Text and Interpretation', in his *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi: ICPR, 1990), pp. 277–8.

15

An Exemplary Indian Intellectual

Bimal Krishna Matilal

Bimal Krishna Matilal is an exemplary case of a modern Indian intellectual whose identity is fashioned through an engagement with and re-appropriation of India's intellectual past. I will first sketch his intellectual biography and then examinine the range and significance of his work. Matilal became the Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the University of Oxford and Fellow of All Souls College in 1976, a position that had earlier been held by the renowned Indian philosopher and later President of India, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Born in 1935 in Joynagar, a small town in West Bengal, he left for Kolkata at the age of 14, where he studied many subjects including mathematics, and was persuaded to take up the study of Navya-Nyāya – the 'new reason' of early modern India – by Gaurinath Sastri, whom, he said, 'encouraged me to enter the dense and thorny world of Navya-nyāya when I was considering more favourably the sunny world of Kāvya [poetry] and Alaṃkāra [poetics]'. He studied with Anantakumar Tarkatirtha and, while doing his MA at Calcutta University, with Taranatha Tarkatirtha. In 1957 he was appointed as lecturer in the Government Sanskrit College, continuing to study Nyāya with eminent pandits including Kalipada Tarkacarya and Madhusudana Nyayacarya. Under their guidance he completed the traditional degree of Tarkatīrtha, Master of Logic and Argument, in 1962. Such was his enthusiasm that there are even rumours that he went to his wedding with a volume of Navya-Nyāya in his pocket. For some time prior to this, Matilal had been in correspondence with Daniel Ingalls, who suggested to him the possibility of moving to Harvard in order to acquaint himself with the work being done by W. V. O. Quine in philosophical and

mathematical logic. Breaking with traditional patterns, Matilal decided to follow this advice, completing his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1965, having attended Quine's classes and continuing his studies in mathematical logic with Dagfinn Føllesdal. In his doctoral thesis, *The Navya-Nyāya Doctrine of Negation*, published by Harvard University Press in 1968, he gives voice to his growing conviction, emerging from this exposure to contemporary logic, that 'India should not, indeed cannot, be left out of any general study of the history of logic and philosophy'. This was to be the first statement of a thesis to the defence of which he devoted his academic life, that our philosophical understanding of the fundamental problems of logic and philosophy is enriched if the ideas of the Indian scholars are brought to bear in the modern discussion. His further researches into Navya-Nyāya, as well as into Indian theory more generally, were published in a range of path-breaking books, including *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis*,[1] *Logic, Language and Reality*,[2] and (posthumously) *The Character of Logic in India*.[3]

It was without doubt very fitting that a conference should have been held in Kolkata in 2007 to commemorate Matilal's enormous contribution to the field.[4] When, 55 years before, D. H. H. Ingalls published his *Materials for the Study of Navya-Nyāya Logic*, what he managed to do above all else was to read the logical theory of Navya-Nyāya with the benefit of contemporary work in logic, especially the work of his Harvard colleague, W. V. Quine. He demonstrated, simply but brilliantly, that the distinctions, techniques and concepts that had been developed by the Naiyāyikas were not mere works of hair-splitting sophistry, as they had appeared to the logically untutored Indological eye, but were rather sophisticated achievements in logical theory. Before Ingalls, one of the few people who could be said to have achieved something similar was Stanisław Schayer, the brilliant student of the Polish logician Łukasiewicz, who tried to re-interpret the early Nyāya theory of inference according to modern logic much as Łukasiewicz had sought to re-interpret the Aristotelian syllogism. Ingalls

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[1] B. K. Matilal, *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis* (Le Hague: Mouton, 1971); 2nd edn (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[2] B. K. Matilal, *Logic, Language and Reality* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985).

[3] B. K. Matilal, *The Character of Logic in India* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998).

[4] See Mihir Chakraborty, Benedikt Loewe and Madhabendra Nath Mitra (eds), *Logic, Navya-Nyāya and Its Applications: Homage to Bimal Krishna Matilal* (London: College Publications, 2008).

was himself very much aided in his work, I should add, by the doctoral thesis of the Calcutta scholar Saileswar Sen, published from Wageningen in 1924 under the title *A Study on Mathurānātha's Tattvacintāmaṇi-rahasya*. Saileswar Sen states that, 'It was in 1920, when I was a student of the University of Calcutta, that I made up my mind to prosecute research studies in Hindu Philosophy in a Dutch University', a decision that led him eventually to Amsterdam, where he worked under the supervision of the great Vaiśeṣika scholar, B. Faddegon. Another scholar from Amsterdam, Frits Staal, wrote a sequence of breakthrough articles in Navya-Nyāya logic in the early 1960s, now collected in his book, *Universals: Studies in Indian Logic and Linguistics*.[5] Staal supervised the doctoral work of Cornelis Goekoop, which resulted in an important publication, *The Logic of Invariable Concomitance in the Tattvacintāmaṇi*.[6] Because of this link between Holland and Kolkata, forged by a shared devotion to the study of logic, it is perhaps not a coincidence that Matilal chose to publish his second book with the Dutch publisher, Mouton.

Ingalls' inspirational approach drew Matilal to Harvard, and I do not think it would be very controversial to say that Matilal soon showed himself to have a finer logical acumen even than Ingalls himself (Ingalls by this time having already returned from Navya-Nyāya to the 'sunny world' of poetics and the translation of poetry). Matilal's interest was in logic per se, as a global human intellectual achievement, and in Indian logic and Navya-Nyāya logic insofar as they were very significant but poorly studied components of that achievement. Indian theory was then, and I believe remains today, a tremendously exciting area for someone to work in who is by temperament a philosopher, that is, not so much interested in the history of ideas as in the ideas themselves, in the potential and possibilities they can lead to. For philosophers in the past have often had ideas or thought in ways that did not enter the mainstream of historical development, and a return to those neglected pathways in the history of thought is sometimes intellectually enriching as nothing else can be.

To give an example of what I mean, one has only to consider the dominance of Aristotle's logic on the development of logic in the West, and to think, for instance, how the Stoics are now admired for their anticipations of the propositional calculus. If many other forks in the history of logic

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[5] Frits Staal, *Universals: Studies in Indian Logic and Linguistics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[6] Cornelis Goekoop, *The Logic of Invariable Concomitance in the Tattvacintāmaṇi* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1967).

in the West were only briefly ventured along, which in many cases can be returned to now with profit, how much more so will that be true of an entire non-Western history of logic, branches, trunk-roads and all? So when Matilal wrote about the relationship between Aristotelian and Nyāya logic, as he did in both his *Logic, Language and Reality* and in his *The Character of Logic in India*, he displayed very little interest indeed in the question that would intrigue a historian of ideas, the question of diffusion or possible historical influence. Matilal's interest was in the philosophical relationship between Greek and Indian logic; indeed he was perhaps the first to demonstrate conclusively that there are structural differences between the two that go deeper than contingent differences in formulation or emphasis. Matilal's insistence that Indian logic is to be thought of as operating with what he calls a 'property-location' model of sentential structure rather than a subject-predicate model, has wide-ranging implications that are still being worked out.

A similar spirit can be seen at work in Matilal's groundbreaking work on the informal logic to be found in the debating manuals of the Naiyāyikas, Buddhists, Medics and Jainas, in comparison with each other and with works such as Aristotle's *Topics* and *Sophistici Elenchi*. Here I would highlight in particular Matilal's defence and rehabilitation of the so-called *viṭaṇḍā*, 'refutation-only', style of debate, in which the proponent advances no thesis at all but merely attacks the opponent's counter-thesis (I described *viṭaṇḍā* briefly in Chapter 1). Matilal simultaneously recognised that such debating positions have an important philosophical value in the construction of sceptical arguments, and offered a defence with the help of speech-act theory and the idea of illocutionary negation. In many ways this epitomises Matilal's approach, which resembles the spirit in which modern philosophers have sought to re-interpret the early Greeks. So when Matilal writes about Nāgārjuna's *catuṣkoṭi* or 'tetralemma', his question is not 'Where did this formula come from?' but 'How is it logically possibly to deny all four lemmas?' This approach is one which he himself describes at various times, as a 're-thinking of the ancient and medieval Indian philosophers in contemporary terms', a re-conceptualisation and re-appropriation of historical ideas which was seen by him as a prerequisite of all creative philosophical thinking.

In his study of Buddhist logic, Matilal again both saw the philosophical importance and asked the critical philosophical questions, challenging the theory with problems it had not previously had to address. Matilal was not the first to notice, for example, that Diṅnāga's idea of a 'triple-condition' or *trirūpa* seems threatened with redundancy problems, but to

him we owe the distinction between an epistemic and a realistic reading of the conditions, as well as a formal solution to the redundancy problem. To Matilal is due also the idea that the Buddhist use of a double negation in its semantic theory incorporates two different negations, which he called 'nominally bound' and 'sententially bound', thereby avoiding a triviality objection. In the last few years there have been several workshops and conferences on Buddhist logic and philosophy of language, and it has seemed evident to me that the trajectory of research over this period has been shaped very greatly by Matilal's framing of the issues.[7] Something similar is true in the field of Jaina logic, where again Matilal asked the philosophical question 'Is Jaina logic paraconsistent?', a question that has generated a lively debate in recent years.

Many of the issues that earlier Indian logicians had wrestled with re-surface, sometimes in a rarified form, in the early modern system of Navya-Nyāya. Matilal's work on negation in Navya-Nyāya, both his book *The Navya-Nyāya Doctrine of Negation* and his article 'Double Negation in Navya-Nyāya' (appropriately first published in a feschrift for Ingalls), are now standard works. Matilal's 'Q' notation, which formed the basis for the later idea of a 'property-location' model, has been the subject of much discussion, and Matilal's conjecture that Navya-Nyāya logic is best understood as a three-valued logic is an ongoing topic of debate. The field of Navya-Nyāya studies has been slower to take off than some of the other areas of research Matilal's work has opened up, and this is of course both an irony and a pity. But with the gradual publication of better editions and translations, and with the continuing search for appropriate tools and concepts from modern theory to assist in its interpretation, I would confidently predict that Matilal's work on philosophical theory in early modern South Asia may yet well prove to be one of his most enduring legacies.

A Conversation among Equals

The articles in Matilal's two volumes of *Collected Essays*[8] reveal much about the extraordinary depth and quality of his philosophical engagement with India. His reputation as one of the leading exponents of Indian

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[7] See, for instance, *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*, ed. Arindam Chakrabarti, Mark Siderits and Tom Tillemans (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[8] Vol. 1: *Mind, Language and World* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Vol. 2: *Ethics and Epics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

logic and epistemology is, of course, reflected here. Yet those who know of him through his work in this field, as I have just described it, may be surprised to discover the range of his other work. His writings deal, in general, with every aspect of intellectual India: from analysis of the arguments of the classical philosophers to evaluation of the role of philosophy in classical Indian society; from diagnosis of Western perceptions of Indian philosophy to analysis of the thought of past Indian intellectuals like Bankimchandra and Radhakrishnan. Matilal, strikingly, is willing to look in a great range of sources for philosophical theory. As well as the writings of the classical Indian philosophical schools, he uses material from the grammatical literature, the epics, lawbooks, medical literature, poetics and literary criticism. Matilal argues that it is only in the study of such diversity of literature that one can discover the mechanisms of the internal criticism to which a dynamic culture necessarily subjects itself in the process of revising and reinterpreting its values and the meaning of its fundamental concepts, and to be sure that one's own evaluation and criticism is immersed in, and not detached from, the practices and perceptions of the culture (vol. 1, ch. 28). He also observes that a selective attention to particular aspects of Indian culture is part of what has generated a set of myths and misperceptions about Indian philosophy, notably the popular idea that Indian philosophy is primarily spiritual and intuitive, in contrast to 'the rational West'. Explicitly recognising this risk of bias produced by selective attention, Matilal extends as widely as possible the 'observational basis' from which his conclusions are drawn.

While his work always appeals to classical Indian sources, Matilal's treatment is neither historical nor philological. He does not engage in the reconstruction of the original Ur-texts, nor in descriptions of the intellectual development of a person or the evolution and chronology of a school. Instead, Matilal approaches the Indian materials with a methodology that is explicitly comparative-philosophical. In one essay, he describes the aims of this approach in the following terms: 'The purpose of the Indian philosopher today who chooses to work on the classical systems is to interpret, and thereby offer a medium where philosophers . . . , both Indian and Western, may converse' (vol. 1, p. 356). Behind this modest statement lay a bold intellectual programme, a reinterpretation of the relationship between contemporary philosophy and the classical cultures.

The history of Indian philosophical studies in the twentieth century has indeed been a history of comparisons, comparisons between Indian philosophy on the one hand, and whichever philosophical system was in vogue on the other. British idealism, logical positivism, neo-Kantian and

ordinary language philosophy have all been used as counterpoints for a comparison with Indian theory. Matilal himself drew mainly on the developments in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. Is Matilal's work, then, simply the latest in a long line of fashionable but transient comparisons, this time between Indian and analytical philosophy? Matilal himself responded to this criticism, arguing that if nothing else his work was a much needed 'corrective', a way of displacing prevalent myths about the irrational and mystical nature of the Indian philosophers. More importantly, he criticised early comparativists for misunderstanding the nature and extent of the problem they were addressing. His predecessors were unclear first of all about the purpose of making the comparison, and in consequence rarely got further than merely juxtaposing doctrines, making priority claims in the history of ideas, or, at best, arguing that a doctrine acquires *prima facie* support if it can be shown to have arisen independently in different places. They could supply, however, no criterion for determining when a point of comparison is significant and when merely superficial. Indeed, the very existence of such a criterion might be cast in doubt by J. N. Mohanty's observation that, in practice, 'just when an exciting point of agreement is identified and pursued, surprising differences erupt; and just when you have the feeling that no two ideas could be further apart, identities catch you off guard'.[9] Comparison is always a process of simplification, in which allegedly 'accidental' differences in formulation or context are eliminated, but without a criterion for distinguishing the accidental from the essential, the comparison lacks proper grounding. Another objection to the early approach is that the Indian theories were mostly treated as the objects of the comparison, to be placed in correspondence with some subset of Western theory, an approach which necessarily denied to them the possibility of original content or of making a contribution to an ongoing investigation.

For Matilal, on the other hand, the goal was never *merely* to compare. His programme was informed, first and foremost, by a deep humanism, a conviction that the classical thinkers should not be thought of as mysterious, exotic, or tradition-bound creatures, but as rational agents trying to understand their cultures and societies with as little prejudice as possible: 'We may discover in this way that in the past we were not all gods or spiritual dolls, but we were at least humans with all their glories and

[9] J. N. Mohanty, 'On Interpreting Indian Philosophy: Some Problems and Concerns,' in P. Bilimoria (ed.), *Essays on Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 207–19, at p. 216.

shortcomings, their ambitions and aspirations, their reasons and emotions' (vol.1, p. 376). It is this humanism in Matilal's approach which is brought out in his claim that the comparativist should create the means whereby philosophers of different ages and societies may converse. The point is to establish the prerequisites for a debate or an interaction, something which can sustain, in Amartya Sen's apt phrase, an 'intellectual connecting' between philosophers of different cultures.[10] The basis for such an interaction is, for Matilal, a shared commitment to a set of evaluative norms on reasoned argument and the assessment of evidence, rather than to any particular shared body of doctrine. A little like the *adhyakṣa* or 'supervisor' in a traditional Indian debate, the comparativist's role in Matilal's conception is to set out and oversee those groundrules, adherence to which is a precondition for the conversation to take place. Matilal's field of expertise was analytical philosophy and so he sought to open the conversation between the classical Indian philosophers and his contemporary analytical colleagues. He succeeded in charting the philosophical terrain, identifying the salient groups of texts appropriate for analytical inquiry (most notably, the *pramāṇa-śāstra*), and pinpointing the topics in which Indian theory can be expected to make a substantial contribution.

Matilal stresses that it is essential for the modern comparativist to have, in addition to sound linguistic and philological skills, a good understanding of 'what counts as a philosophical problem in the classical texts' (vol.1, p. 356). How does one know, when reading a classical text, what is to count as a philosophical problem? Broadly speaking, there have been two sorts of response to this question: universalism and relativism. Universalism, in its extreme form, is the doctrine that philosophical problems are global, that diverse philosophical cultures are addressing the same questions, and that the differences between them are ones of style rather than content. A more moderate universalism claims only that there is a single logical space of philosophical problems, in which different cultures explore overlapping but not necessarily co-extensive regions. Universalists believe that there is a *philosophia perennis*, a global philosophy, whose nature will be revealed by a synthesis or amalgamation of the ideas of East and West. The alternative, relativism, states in *its* extreme form that philosophical problems are entirely culture-specific, that each tradition has its own private conceptual scheme, incommensurable with all others. A more moderate relativism permits a 'notional' commensuration of the ideas of diverse cultures,

[10] Amartya Sen, *Address* delivered on the occasion of a commemoration of Bimal Krishna Matilal at All Souls College, 6 June 1992.

but insists that the similarities are in style alone, and not in content. The doctrines of the East can be made to look familiar to a Western thinker, similar enough indeed to seem intelligible; but in substance, they are quite different.

A Common Ground?

Matilal unambiguously rejects relativism, and he offers both a critique and an alternative. The alternative is most clearly formulated in his later analysis of relativism in moral theory. He formulates there a thesis of 'minimal universal morality,' the doctrine that there are certain basic and universally applicable values, a 'minimal moral fabric underlying all societies and all groups of human beings' (vol. 2, p. 260). The minimal universal morals are values which attach to the 'naked man' stripped of specific cultural context; they are, perhaps, the basic capacities and needs associated with one's position as a human being in a society. These are values which the comparativist can identify, if he approaches the other culture with humanity and imagination (vol. 1, chs. 24, 25). The existence of such raw human values is consistent with there being substantive and even incommensurable local differences, and for this reason Matilal regarded his position as combining pluralism with moral realism. The relativist, mistaking the local, context-specific values of a given society with the totality of its values, overlooks the existence of a commonality which can serve as the basis of real confrontation, interaction and exchange between cultures: 'To transform two monologues into a dialogue we need a common ground, some common thought patterns between the participants, as well as a willingness to listen to each other' (vol. 2, p. 163).

At the same time, it is the local, culture-specific values which characterise or individuate a given culture, distinguish it from others. The characteristic values of a culture, religion, or society are often the interesting and important things to explore, but it is the existence of a common framework that makes it possible to explore them: 'I do not say that different Indian religions talk simply about the same thing in different languages and idioms. . . . Rather, I would say that they talk about different things while standing on a common ground' (vol. 2, p. 174). Underlying Matilal's humane pluralism is a bold recognition that 'human nature is manifold and is expressed through diverse values, ways of thinking, acting and feeling' (vol. 2, p. 387), that global human values can co-exist with culture-specific constraints, that genuinely conflicting values are possible, and that they are possible because of the existence of a common set of values.

The idea has a specific application in Matilal's approach to comparative philosophy. Here the common ground consists in norms governing rational argument. Any conversation between Indian and Western philosophers depends on there being a minimum of agreement, or at least a limit on difference, about what counts as a rational argument or a well-conducted investigation into a philosophical problem. Rationality in a minimal sense is itself a universal value. When he has identified the idioms for these shared principles of rational argument, a comparativist has a common ground from which to explore differences. Matilal's pluralism acknowledges what is right about both universalism and relativism, without being reducible to either. His writings are 'marvellous conversations of mankind',[11] between Sextus Empiricus and Sañjaya, Strawson and Udayana and Bhartṛhari and Quine.

Matilal sought in his work to bring classical India into the philosophical mainstream, thereby 'transforming the exile into companion'.[12] If the Sanskrit philosophical literature had indeed been excluded from the philosophical curriculum, it was because of a myth, the myth that there are two philosophical cultures – one Eastern, spiritual, atavistic; the other Western, rational, materialistic – cultures having incommensurable values, doctrines and standards. As H. H. Price, while Wykeham Professor of Logic at Oxford, would put the matter, 'We seem to be confronted with two entirely different worlds of thought, so different that there is not even the possibility of disagreement between them. The one looks outward, and is concerned with Logic and with the presuppositions of scientific knowledge; the other inward, into the 'deep yet dazzling darkness' of the mystical consciousness'.[13] Matilal ruefully comments, in a slightly different context, that in this strange mixture of fact and imagination, it is as if the Westerner is set on conquering the other (foreign lands, the material world), and the Indian on conquering himself (his inner world) (vol. 2, p. 274). In any case, the effect of the division was to deny to 'Orientals' the status of being people-like-us: 'The Oriental man is either subhuman or superhuman, never human. He is either a snake-charmer, a native, an outlandish species, or else a Bhagawan,

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[11] J. N. Mohanty, 'A Conversation of Mankind', Review of B. K. Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 October 1986.

[12] The phrase is from Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East 1680–1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), p. 1.

[13] H. H. Price, 'The Present Relations between Eastern and Western Philosophy', *The Hibbert Journal*, vol. liii (1955) pp. 222–9, at p. 228.

a Maharishi, a Mahārāja, an exotic person, a Prabhupāda. The implication of the presupposition is that there cannot be any horizontal relationship between East and West' (vol. 1, p. 373).

Matilal regarded the very idea that there are independently bounded and closed philosophical cultures as a dogma of orientalism, albeit a self-sustaining one which has served the historical interests of Indian and Western philosophers alike. Mysticism and spirituality, the properties projected onto the East, do not fit the Western self-image as rational and scientific: 'It is as if our Western man is embarrassed to acknowledge anything that is even remotely irrational or mystical as part of his indigenous heritage' (vol. 2, p. 273). So streams of thought such as Neoplatonism have been marginalised in the standard history of Western philosophy. In no less measure, Indian authors like Radhakrishnan have wished to downplay the rationalist streams in the Indian cultures in their desire to represent Indian culture as distinctively spiritual and intuitive, a desire at one with the nationalist search for an autonomous Indian identity (vol. 1, ch. 26). Anthropologists and 'colonial liberals' have also found the relativist dogma convenient, for it absolved them of the need to make value judgements on the practices of the society being governed or observed. The platitude, however, is a myth: 'The fact of the matter is that materialism and spiritualism, rationality and irrationalism-cum-intuitionism, are monopolies of neither India nor the West' (vol. 1, p. 428). Matilal's argument against the dogma (and indeed against other expressions of cultural relativism) is that it is impossible to individuate cultures in any such way as would give them sharp boundaries: cultures are always mixing and merging with each other, identities are being enriched and revised by adoption and absorption (vol. 2, chs. 18, 19). Indeed, it is for Matilal the very mutability of cultures which shows real confrontation between them to be possible. If relativism were true, the only confrontation that could occur would be notional, and would have no impact on the values of either culture. Matilal's insistence that cultures do not have unchanging, immutable essences anticipates Amartya Sen's denial of the existence of 'cultural boundaries' in the reach of reasons;[14] even what seem to be the most characteristic and embedded values of a culture are subject to gradual trade-offs, rejections, and modifications in the course of time.

Matilal, then, as an intellectual had no desire simply to be a scholar of Indian intellectual history. He regarded himself as a philosopher in a cosmopolitan sense, a member of a global intellectual community. He was also

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[14] Amartya, Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* (London: Allen Lane 2005; London: Penguin 2006).

very much a situated interpreter, in the sense I defined in the last chapter: someone for whom the engagement with India's past was an important ingredient in the fashioning of his own intellectual identity as a philosopher. Nourishing his philosophical imagination with ideas made available to him by this past, he was perfectly able to offer a critique of contemporary analytical theory when appropriate; and it is for this reason that it is a somewhat facile misunderstanding of Matilal as a thinker to suppose that he was simply using analytical philosophy as a standard with which to evaluate Indian theory.[15] It was through a retrieval of Indian theory that Matilal fashioned himself as a contemporary intellectual; and, as a modern intellectual, he was able to criticise both Indian and Western theory alike.

In earlier chapters of this book, I have nevertheless canvassed a model for comparative philosophy that departs in certain key respects from Matilal's. I have suggested, in Chapter 7, that the very act of bringing distinct philosophical cultures into contact should be seen as being itself a creative one, the act of creating a 'case' or Kasus, a site of unresolved tension between conflicting measures; and that the working out of the 'case' is itself constitutive of a form of philosophical practice, producing in time new measures, new philosophies, new models for the way individuals conceive of themselves and their place in the world. My analysis of one system of value, Hinduism, in Chapter 5, was an illustration of the way in which such forms of philosophical practice can be governed by reason even in the absence of some explicitly identifiable common ground, through the operation of what I called, in Chapter 4, 'local norms'. Such acts of creative philosophical confrontation, of which situated interpretation is a prime example, are by their very nature short-lived and particular, and the norms by which they are governed must themselves be created anew each time. Through this approach, the comparative philosopher identifies cases of interesting resemblance, and, in the spirit of the theory I set out in Parts I and II of this book, exploits those moments of resemblance in processes of adaptation and substitution to fashion new strategies in philosophical inquiry.

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[15] Thus Wilhelm Halbfass, who accuses Matilal of using analytical philosophy as a 'standard of evaluation' in *On Being and What There is: Classical Vaiśeṣika and the History of Indian Ontology*; (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1992), p. 82; or as a 'measure' in *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 158 of Indian thought.

16

India and the Shaping of Global Intellectual Culture

In the previous chapter I described how a re-appropriation of India's intellectual past can contribute to the shaping of a contemporary intellectual identity. In the work of Bimal Matilal there is, manifestly, no attempt to conceal the importance of India, or the extent to which his identity as an intellectual has evolved out of his creative borrowing from it. In this final chapter, I will briefly record a more disingenuous form of borrowing from India's past, one in which the intellectual pretends that no such borrowing has taken place, and indeed diminishes India in the process. There are two reasons why it is of considerable importance to make explicit the mechanisms by which this process operates. For, first, the true reach of India's intellectual influence on the development of global intellectual culture is thereby brought into focus, countering the notion that this culture has exclusively European or Western origins. And, second, it enables us to understand a fact documented by both Amartya Sen and Bimal Matilal, namely the strange diminishing of intellectual India, especially Indian philosophy, and its exclusion from contemporary discourse. Sen speaks of the 'extraordinary neglect of Indian works on reasoning, science, mathematics and other so-called "Western spheres of success"',[1] and says, to repeat an earlier quotation, that

[1] Amartya, Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* (London: Allen Lane 2005; London: Penguin 2006), p. 80. See also his 'India and the West', *The New Republic*, 7 June 1993.

> In comparing Western thoughts and creations with those in India, the appropriate counterpoints of Aristotelian or Stoic or Euclidean analyses are not the traditional beliefs of the Indian rural masses or of the local wise men but the comparably analytical writings of, say, Kauṭilya or Nāgārjuna or Āryabhaṭa. 'Socrates meets the Indian peasant' is not a good way to contrast the respective intellectual traditions.[2]

Insofar as the analytical writings from intellectual India do remain invisible to contemporary global intellectual culture, the reason is at least in part to do with a historical unwillingness on the part of Western intellectuals to acknowledge the influence of those writings on their own intellectual development. It follows from this act of concealment that to Indian wisdom can be conceded only, in the words of H. H. Price, 'the "deep yet dazzling darkness" of the mystical consciousness'. I will try to reveal the mechanism that has led to the historical diminution of intellectual India by identifying several instances where India's cultures of reason do appear to have exercised a tangible influence on the emergence of modern philosophy in Britain, and showing evidence of how this influence has been suppressed.

Covert Borrowings

When one country colonises another, it is only to be expected that there will be a cultural back-flow, elements in the colonised culture seeping into that of the coloniser. Britain's long colonial occupation of India ought to be a prime case, and indeed many aspects of India's cultural matrix did infiltrate the British way of life – for instance in food, language, dress and the arts. The apparent absence of influence of Indian philosophical ideas in the British philosophy of that or subsequent periods must be regarded, therefore, as a curious anomaly that stands in some need of explanation. One possibility, clearly, is that Indian ideas did influence British philosophers, but that that influence was disguised. It would hardly be surprising if a British philosopher of the period felt reluctant to admit that a philosophical idea had its origin in the colonised, and therefore inferior, culture. What one would rather expect is that the idea would be re-worked as an original idea of the author, and at the same time the true source belittled.

[2] *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 158.

Berating the 'Indian philosophers' did indeed seem to be an acceptable trope for British philosophers of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the following statement of John Locke (1632–1704) already illustrates:

> Had the poor Indian philosopher (who imagined that the earth also wanted some thing to bear it up) but thought of this word substance, he needed not to have been at the trouble to find an elephant to support it, and a tortoise to support his elephant: The word substance would have done it effectually. And he that enquired, might have taken it for as good an answer from an Indian philosopher, that substance, without knowing what it is, is that which supports the earth; as we take it for a sufficient answer, and good doctrine, from our European philosophers, that substance, without knowing what it is, is that which supports accidents.[3]

Leibniz would castigate Locke, saying, 'I do not believe that it is fair to mock philosophers, as your author does when he compares them to an Indian philosopher who was asked . . .' and adding that 'this [Indian] conception of substance, for all its apparent thinness, is less empty and sterile than it is thought to be. Several consequences arise from it; these are of the greatest importance to philosophy, to which they can give an entirely new face.'[4] While it has proven difficult accurately to trace Locke's source of information about his 'Indian philosophers', it seems very likely that he took the image from Samuel Purchas, who wrote in his 1626 *Purchas, His Pilgrimage* that some Hindus believe

> that the Earth had nine corners, whereby it was borne up by the Heaven. Others dissented, and said, that the Earth was borne up by seven Elephants; the Elephants feet stood on Tortoises, and they were borne by they know not what.[5]

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[3] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Book 2, Chapter 13, Sec. 19.

[4] G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Remnant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Book 2, Chapter 23.

[5] J. Charpentier, 'A Treatise on Hindu Cosmography from the Seventeenth Century (Brit. Mus. MS. Sloane 2748 A)', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London* 3, 2 (1924), pp. 317–42.

Charpentier manages to trace Purchas's source: a letter by the Jesuit Emanuel de Veiga (1549–1605), written in Chandagiri on the eighteenth of September, 1599.[6] What is interesting is that while de Veiga speaks, perfectly correctly, about the beliefs of some Hindus, it is Locke's own contribution to presume that these Hindu believers are representative of Indian *philosophy*. The diminution of intellectual India occurs at exactly this point in the history of the textual transmission; it is a splendid example of the 'Socrates meets the Indian peasant' strategem at work.

Ironically, it is now thought that Locke studied the work of French empiricist Pierre Gassendi, whose writings were made available by François Bernier on his return from a lengthy stay in India, during which, according to his own testimony, he translated Descartes and Gassendi into Persian and had Indian philosophical theory in turn explained to him. It is in any case certainly a pity that Locke was utterly unaware of the detailed work in metaphysics, philosophical logic and semantic theory then being done by his early modern Indian contemporaries, [7] for instance the work of Gadādhara Bhaṭṭacārya (1604–1709) on semantics, work that would have made Locke's own ideas in the philosophy of language seem 'poor' indeed by comparison.[8]

David Hume (1711–1776) would also use the expression 'Indian philosopher' with reference to the same cosmological allegory:

> How, therefore, shall we satisfy ourselves concerning the cause of that Being whom you suppose the Author of Nature, or, according to your system of Anthropomorphism, the ideal world, into which you trace the material? Have we not got the same reason to trace that ideal world into another ideal world, or new intelligent principle? But if we stop, and go no further, why go so far? Why not stop at the material world? How can we satisfy ourselves without going on ad

[6] Quoting the letter from John Hay, *De rebus Japonicis, Indicis, et Peruanis epistulæ recentiores* (Antwerp, 1605), p. 803 seq.: 'Alii dicebant terram novem constare angulis, quibus cœlo innititur. Alius ab his dissentiens volebat terram septem elephantis fulciri, elephantes uero ne subsiderent, super testudine pedes fixos habere. Quærenti quis testudinis corpus firmaret, ne dilaberetur, respondere nesciuit.'

[7] Reviewed in my *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[8] I examine the quite extraordinary contributions made by Gadādhara to the philosophy of language in my *Semantic Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), ideas that did not find a corresponding articulation in Western philosophy until the second half of the twentieth century.

> infinitum? And, after all, what satisfaction is there in that infinite progression? Let us remember the story of the Indian philosopher and his elephant. It was never more applicable than to the present subject.[9]

For Hume, certainly, 'the Indian' is a symbol for that which lies completely outside the orb of one's acquaintance:

> It is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. It is not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian, or person wholly unknown to me.[10]

One Indian may have been better known to Hume than he realised, though. Two of the French sources from whom Hume 'borrowed', while he was writing the *Treatise* at the Jesuit academy, La Flèche, were Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) and Pierre Bayle (1647–1706). Both were affected by the missionary-mediated interest in all things Chinese, and both were to write on Chinese Philosophy – Malebranche, a *Conversation between a Christian Philosopher and Chinese Philosopher* (1708), Bayle, the *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1703) – works that would, in turn, help to shape the views of Leibniz and Hegel. A good deal of what is recorded in the *Dictionary* as 'Chinese' is, in fact, a description of the life and ideas of the Buddha, including descriptions of the emptiness of the notion of soul. It remains a distinct possibility, therefore, that the origin of Hume's idea about the self as a bundle of perceptions can be traced backwards along the Silk Road to this 'person wholly unknown'. Alison Gopnik has recently brought to light valuable new evidence, this pertaining to the role of Dolu and Desideri in transmitting knowledge of Buddhism in Tibet to Hume by way, once again, of what she describes as a global intellectual Jesuit network.[11]

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[9] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 161.

[10] David, Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford, 1888), Bk 2, Pt 3, Sec. 3, Para. 6.

[11] 'Could David Hume Have Known about Buddhism? Charles François Dolu, the Royal College of La Flèche, and the Global Jesuit Intellectual Network', *Hume Studies* 35 (2009), pp. 5–28.

There is evidence that Hume had also read Bernier. Bernier refers to an idea of the Hindus, the idea that

> God has not only produced life from his own substance, but also generally everything material or corporeal in the universe, and that this production is not formed simply after the manner of efficient causes, but as a spider which produces a web from its own navel, and withdraws it at pleasure. The Creation then, say these visionary doctors, is nothing more than an extraction or extension of the individual substance of God, of those filaments which He draws from his own bowels; and, in like manner, destruction is merely the recalling of that divine substance and filaments into Himself. [12]

Bernier adds that this idea has led him to take as his motto the slogan that 'There is no Doctrine too strange or too improbable for the Soul of man to conceive,' perhaps echoing Descartes, who, reflecting on the philosophical value of his own travels, says, '[I]n my school days I discovered that nothing can be imagined which is too strange or incredible to have been said by some philosopher; and since then I have recognized through my travels that those with views quite contrary to ours are not on that account barbarians or savages'.[13] Hume made famous the image of the spider to which Bernier refers, decrying the Hindu belief that God is a spider in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*:

> The Brahmins assert, that the world arose from an infinite spider, who spun this whole complicated mass from his bowels, and annihilates afterwards the whole or any part of it, by absorbing it again, and resolving it into his own essence. Here is a species of cosmogony, which appears to us ridiculous; because a spider is a little contemptible animal, whose operations we are never likely to take for a model of the whole universe. But still here is a new species of analogy, even in our globe.[14]

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[12] 'Letter to Monsieur Chapelain, Despatched from Chiras in Persia, the 4th October 1667', in Bernier 1981; trans. Irvind Brock, *Travels in the Mogul Empire AD 1656–1668* (London: W. Pickering 1834; 3rd edn), pp. 323–5.

[13] René Descartes, *Discourses* at vi. 16; *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 118–19.

[14] *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 180.

While Hume makes no attempt to disguise his contempt, the idea of a self-creating process for which the spider is merely a colourful metaphor was and continues to be a philosophically very productive one.

It seems that during the period of British colonial rule there was a widespread disinclination openly to discuss Indian philosophical ideas, so much so that the dominant impression the British left in the minds of Indian intellectuals of the period was of the British as being a profoundly unphilosophical people. The Benares-based scholar James R. Ballantyne (1813–1864) spoke of

> the impression, here yet too prevalent, that the Europeans [i.e. the British], though capital workers in brass and iron, had better leave the discussion of things intellectual to those whose land was the birth-place of philosophy.[15]

It is difficult to establish the exact influence that Indian ideas about logic may have had on the British logicians George Boole (1815–1864) and Augustus De Morgan (1806–1871), although there is evidence of a line of transmission through a fellow member of the Royal Society, the brilliant Indologist and translator of Indian philosophical and mathematical texts, Henry T. Colebrooke (1765–1837).[16] The absence of any mention of Indian philosophy in the philosophical work of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), son of the author of the colonial manifesto *A History of British India*, James Mill, and himself an administrator in the East India Company, is exceptionally striking; and yet he was in correspondence with Ballantyne, who had by then translated works in Indian logic, several of which contain accounts of a method of agreement and difference very similar to Mill's own.

It is probable too that Mill read or heard Colebrooke's famous lecture of 1827, in which he described the emergentist philosophy of mind of the Indian materialist school of Cārvāka,[17] a theory which modern historians now trace back to Mill. It is striking how many of the ideas that were to find a place in British Emergentism are already here. Mill used the example

[15] James R. Ballantyne, 'On "Logic" and "Rhetoric"', in his *Christianity Contrasted With Hindu Philosophy* (London: J. Madden, 1859), Appendix C, p. 150.

[16] For further details, see the introduction to my *Indian Logic: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[17] Published in H. T. Colebrooke, *Miscellaneous Essays*, 2 vols (London: W.H. Allen, 1837).

of chemical change to illustrate his idea of a 'heteropathic law' in *A System of Logic*.[18] Mill goes on to say that 'All organised bodies are composed of parts, similar to those composing inorganic nature, and which have even themselves existed in an inorganic state; but the phenomena of life, which result from the juxtaposition of those parts in a certain manner, bear no analogy to any of the effects which would be produced by the action of the component substances considered as mere physical agents.' (Bk. III, Ch. 6, §1). It seems likely that Mill, a person whose duties as a senior official of the East India Company included correspondence with Colebrooke, and who belonged along with him to a circle of London literati based around the Royal Society, would have heard Colebrooke's lecture or read it when it was published in 1837, the very time he was working on *A System of Logic*. Colebrooke's work enjoyed in general an extremely wide circulation – even Hegel had some of his writings, and his translations of Sanskrit texts about mathematics were, as I have mentioned, well known to De Morgan and Boole.[19] I cannot help but wonder whether the Indian materialist Bṛhaspati did not after all have a role in the emergence of British emergentism.

My personal hope is that as Britain's conception of its place in the world evolves, British philosophers in the future will wish to dissociate themselves from this peculiar amnesia about intellectual India, and instead find in the historical relationship between India and Britain something that is to be recovered and celebrated.

Other Routes of Influence

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) both appreciated Indian thought and recognised the challenges that any serious engagement with it presents:

> Two years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Lanman, and a year in the mazes of Patañjali's metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods, left me in a state of enlightened mystification. A good half of the effort of understanding what the Indian philosophers were

[18] John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*, 2 vols (London: John W. Parker, 1843).

[19] Colebrooke's primary source for Cārvāka, Rāmatīrtha's commentary on the *Vedānta-sāra*, was first published in 1828. It was translated into German by Othmar Frank in 1835 and into English by Ram Mohun Roy in 1832. Two influential British Indologists, J. R. Ballantyne and A. E. Gough, published translations in subsequent decades. Cārvāka was thus readily available to English-speaking audiences in the early nineteenth century.

> after – and their subtleties make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys – lay in trying to erase from my mind all the categories and kinds of distinction common to European philosophy from the time of the Greeks. My previous and concomitant study of European philosophy was hardly better than an obstacle. And I came to the conclusion – seeing also that the 'influence' of Brahmin and Buddhist thought upon Europe, as in Schopenhauer, Hartmann and Deussen, had largely been through romantic misunderstanding – that my only hope of really penetrating to the heart of that mystery would lie in forgetting how to think and feel as an American or a European.[20]

Eliot is referring to a romantic idealisation of India that flourished among German intellectuals in the nineteenth century, but was a much weaker force within British intellectual circles. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), for instance, went so far as to say of a Latin translation of the Upaniṣads that 'it is the most profitable and sublime reading that is possible in the world; it has been the consolation of my life and will be that of my death'; Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) would later receive via Schopenhauer the Upaniṣadic idea that the self is not itself an object of representation. The 'romantic misunderstanding' of Indian philosophy in continental Europe might itself have contributed to its failure explicitly to influence a more hard-nosed British approach in philosophy, the Germanic 'Oriental Renaissance' disinclining British philosophers from a serious consideration of Indian philosophy, the fact that it was Britain and not Germany which occupied India notwithstanding.

Two Indian thinkers who did later succeed in introducing Indian philosophical theory to a reserved British audience were both holders of the Spalding Professorship at Oxford: Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) and Bimal Krishna Matilal (1935–1991). Radhakrishnan's attempt to display India's rich tradition of philosophical idealism was, unfortunately, mistimed; by then, the short-lived school of British Idealism had already begun to fall into disgrace. His brilliant lecture to the British Academy on the Buddha was attended by, among others, T. S. Eliot, and led to membership in the Academy a year later. Matilal, whose profile as an intellectual I discussed in the previous chapter, in introducing his Oxford colleagues to the rich culture of Indian rational thinking, had more lasting success: Peter

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[20] T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), p. 40.

Strawson, Derek Parfit and Michael Dummett have all paid tribute both to Matilal's own philosophical brilliance and to the importance of the Indian ideas he has brought to their attention (in the case of Parfit, the Buddhist analysis of persons, and for Strawson, the descriptive metaphysics of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika).

A more persistent influence of Indian ideas has been felt in the areas of social and political philosophy, ecology and other branches of applied ethics. Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900) was early in recognising the importance and relevance of Buddhist theory to contemporary ethics:

> It is not necessary, if we are simply considering Ethics as a possible independent science, to throw the fundamental premiss of which we are now examining the validity into a Theistic form. In the Buddhist creed this notion of the rewards inseparably attaching to right conduct seems to have been developed in a far more elaborate and systematic manner than it has in any phase of Christianity. But, as conceived by enlightened Buddhists, these rewards are not distributed by the volition of a Supreme Person, but by the natural operation of an impersonal Law.[21]

That trend has continued, and there has been a considerable cross-cultural discussion of, for example, the virtues, human rights, the value of nature, abortion and euthanasia. Attempts have been made to introduce Gandhi's political philosophy, itself influenced by a Jaina philosophical principle of non-harm, into a broader theoretical discourse.[22] It would not surprise me either if it were to turn out that the development of elements of jursiprudence (such as Levi's particularist theory of legal reasoning, noted in Chapter 4) bore traces of influence of extensive British engagement with Hindu law and canonical *dharma-śāstra*.

It has been said that 'a truly new and truly original book would be one which made people love old truths'.[23] I have argued that modern individuals – in both Asia and in the West – have much to gain from India's 'old truths' about reason, identity and dissent, provided only that such a

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[21] Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1962), p. 507.

[22] See, for example, Akeel Bilgrami, 'Gandhi's Integrity: The Philosophy behind the Politics', *Postcolonial Studies* 5 (2002), pp. 79–93.

[23] Vauvenargues, *Réflections et maximes*, §400. F. G. Stevens (trans.), *The Reflections and Maxims of Luc de Clapiers, marquis of Vauvenargues* (London : Humphrey Milford, 1940).

rediscovery of India's long culture of argumentation and public reasoning is substantive and not merely gestural. I have argued that this should not be thought of as a merely archaeological affair, best left to historians, for as has also been very well said, 'No philosopher understands his predecessors until he has re-thought their thought in his own contemporary terms; and it is characteristic of the very greatest philosophers that they, more than any others, repay this effort'.[24] Re-thinking India's intellectual past is a way to enrich the fashioning of a contemporary intellectual identity, and, indeed, I have now also argued, has been so for longer than is usually recognised. What presents itself as Western intellectual culture has deeper roots in the non-West than is customarily acknowledged. Equally, the sort of retrieval of India's intellectual past which I have been recommending, in *all* its complexity and multi-sidedness, can be expected to shape global intellectual culture in the future, all the more so as India continues to expand its economic presence in the world.

An acknowledgement of India's role in shaping global intellectual culture is the way to respond to another sort of challenge: 'The question that has to be faced here is whether such exercises of reasoning require values that are not available in some cultures.'[25] In particular, what is at stake are the values of liberalism: tolerance, mutual respect, the dignity of humanity, rights, justice. The answer to that challenge is simply that there are no cultural barriers to the availability of values such as these, that the idea that there *are* such cultural barriers is an ideology of the West, reinforced by its deprecation of the intellectual cultures of the non-West. Concepts of tolerance, dignity and rights are not the proprietary invention of the West, and indeed have demonstrable roots in India's own cultures of political and ethical reflection. Thus, and this will be my final example of Indian theory, a failure to allow reason to shape one's moral identity is clearly censured in the following passage of the *Mahābhārata*:

> There was an ascetic by the name of Kauśika, lacking very much knowledge of the scriptures. He lived in a spot far from the village, at the confluence of several rivers. He made a vow, saying, 'I must always speak the truth.' He became celebrated as a speaker of the truth. At that time some people, running in fear from a band of robbers, entered the wood where Kauśika lived. The robbers, filled with rage, searched carefully for them there. Then, approaching Kauśika,

[24] Peter Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1959), p. 11.
[25] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 282.

> the speaker of truth, they questioned him, saying 'O holy one, by which path have a group of men gone a little while ago? Answer us this question, which we ask in the name of Truth. If you have seen them, tell us.' Thus adjured, Kauśika told them the truth, saying, 'Those men have entered this wood crowded with many trees and creepers and plants.' Exactly so did Kauśika give them the information. Then those cruel men, it is reported, locating the people they sought, killed all of them. As a consequence of that great sin, which consisted in the words he spoke, Kauśika, ignorant of the subtleties of morality, descended into hell. (MBh. 8.69.40–46; trans. K. M. Ganguli)

The subtleties of morality of which Kauśika is unaware are, presumably, those passages in the lawbooks (*dharma-śāstra*) which explain the circumstances under which untruthfulness is morally permissible or even obligatory.[26] The clear implication is that Kauśika is to be held responsible for the consequences of his thoughtless commitment to truth-telling, that he is culpably ignorant of the analysis of moral reasoning available to him in his own literature. Had he known this piece of Indian intellectual theory, he would have understood that a respect for the human rights of others trumps any narrow commitment to universals in moral law.

[26] I discuss the relevant passages in my *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 85–93.

Concluding Summary

I have argued that you must understand your identity as an individual in both public and private space as grounded in your exercise of reason, and I have claimed that this should be thought of not as an abstract Kantian exercise of derivation from categorical and hypothetical imperatives but rather as a process grounded in the local normative function of exemplary cases. The clash of different potential sources of identity within an individual constitutes a 'case' (Kasus), and the way they resolve it, adapting and substituting, is constitutive of their identity. The ancients brokered identities in ways responsive to their times; modern individuals must learn from this example but adapt it to fit new circumstances. Bearing in mind the distinction between subjective and objective aspects of identity – where the objective aspects of one's identity are such as those deriving from one's biological inheritance, while one's subjective identity consists in those among one's characteristics which one values and endorses valuing in a relatively non-revisable manner – my investigation has been into the processes by which you fashion a sense of self through the ways you reason about which values to endorse.[1] I have argued that at the heart of such processes lies a case-based rather than rule-governed model of reasoned activity, one fundamentally characterised in terms of mechanisms of adaptation and substitution from local norms.

More exactly, an individual who fashions an identity solely around a commitment to categorical and hypothetical imperatives represents an extreme case of the model I have been developing, one in which only those features in terms of which every particular resembles *every* other are held to be significant. Likewise, an identity fashioned around a commitment to 'individual reasons' and absolute particularity, such as in some versions of moral particularism, is an example of the limiting case

[1] Akeel Bilgrami, 'Note Towards the Definition of "Identity"', in Jyotirmaya Sharma and A. Raghuramajaru (eds), *Grounding Morality: Freedom, Knowledge and the Plurality of Cultures* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), pp. 43–59.

at the other extreme, where *none* of the features in terms of which any particular resembles any other is deemed to be of deliberative relevance. The model I have proposed thus includes particularism and universalism as special cases, the result of letting one or another of the variables in the model run to zero. Individuals have choices to make not only *with the aid of* a model of reason but also *about* the profile of the model itself, the two sorts of choice feeding back into one another until reflective equilibrium is achieved. Reason and identity co-exist in a relationship of mutual re-adjustment. And one can certainly always look for explanations of the particular choices that have been made.

I have been arguing that the idea of India is indeed an open, assimilative and spacious one, sustaining a plurality of voices, mainstream and dissenting, of many ages, regions and affiliations. Modern individuals can call upon all these voices and cultures, re-think them, adapt and modify them, use the resources of reason they make available in deliberation about who to be, how to behave and upon what to agree. That is a fundamental freedom, and it ought not to be surrendered by limiting oneself to narrower, constricted understandings of India, whether one's attitude to those impoverished understandings is one of endorsement or dismissal. There exists a fluid, dynamic relationship of re-appropriation to India's past, the situated interpreter conscious of the requirements of their contemporary circumstance.

Finally, I have argued that participation in secular democratic political institutions is fully compatible with having a conception of the good grounded in a particular religious affiliation, as long as that affiliation provides one with the resources of reason that make such participation possible. This requires the cultivation of an attitude of openness to the full richness of the intellectual past, and I have been at pains to show how the example I have chosen to explore, the intellectual cultures of India, contain within themselves a range of astonishingly sophisticated dissenting voices, whose techniques and arguments are fully available in the construction of a contemporary critical intellectual stance.

The existence of these internal voices of dissent is enough to establish that the resources of reason available to a individual in a particular culture can be turned in upon themselves, making it possible for individuals to call into question and even to reject the very values and beliefs that the culture presents to them. It is thus precisely because identity is a work of reason that there is no legitimacy in using one's identity as an apology for one's behaviour, values, or attitudes. Any given cultural practice or value is your own precisely because and to the extent that, of all the practices

and values available to you, you have conferred on *this one* your rational endorsement, and that was something which, even allowing for pragmatic constraints bearing upon the choices available, you need not have done. To someone who says, 'I do this, because that's just what people with my identity do,' the reply must always be that *this* identity is *yours* just because this is what you choose to do.

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